THE HISTORICAL WORKS OF JON ESPOLIN AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES : ASPECTS OF ICELANDIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

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CONTENTS

SUMMARY

This study attempts to examine historical writing in Iceland in the period c.1790-c.1830 (with a special emphasis on Jon Espolin), its place in the evolution of Icelandic historiography, and its relation to historical writing in Europe at that time.

This was a period of transition in Iceland, material adversity and cultural conflicts, which is reflected in the works of the Icelandic historians of the period. Most of them (apart from the Old Norse scholars residing in Copenhagen) were not professional scholars and not all of them had had much formal education. For the most part they did not write with an eye to publication, but their works often circulated in manuscript. They have to be seen in the context of a small, impoverished, isolated but close-knit society; there was much interest in history among the common people. The Icelandic historiographical tradition is clearly seen in the works of these historians, e.g. in emphasis laid on preserving knowledge for knowledge's sake, interest in genealogy, and in annalistic writing.

In spite of the importance of the native tradition, foreign influences on Icelandic historiography in the period were strong. These were largely associated with the Enlightenment (there was always a considerable time-lag between intellectual developments in Iceland and those in the outside world). This is

both seen in the choice of topics and in the ideas expounded. Desire to educate the nation, belief in progress, advocacy of tolerance, disapproval of superstition, and lack of enthusiasm for the Middle Ages are among the Enlightenment traits found in the works of the Icelandic historians of the period.

Their apparently wholehearted support of the Danish monarchy is evident as is their religiosity of the Lutheran, orthodox or rationalistic, variety - they were strongly anti-Roman Catholic. Apprehension for what they saw as increased laxity in Icelandic society is seen in their works, but their ideas on various social issues such as penal law differed.

The most important Icelandic historian of the period was Jon Espolin. His voluminous works are for the most part factual, often annalistic compilations, but on occasions he displayed sharp judgement and analytical skills, which he has sometimes not been given credit for. Even though his approach was basically traditional, he was in certain ways influenced by the Enlightenment. Two of the other most important historical writers of the period can more definitely be labelled as Enlightenment historians: Hannes Finnsson and Magnus Stephensen.

None of the historians had an elaborate theory of history, but religious determinism can be discerned in their works as can the view that history is didactic, and the idea of progress as a yardstick on which historical developments are measured occurs.

Overall the period was not a turning-point in the evolution of Icelandic historiography, but Espolin certainly was a considerable influence on later historical writing.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

I have chosen to spell the Icelandic in the text and in the quotations according to present-day rules; in the period with which I am mainly concerned there were no established orthographic rules and even the spelling of the same writer was often inconsistent.

The thesis is typed on typewriters which do not have the Icelandic letters þ, ð, and æ; th, d, and ae, respectively, have been put in their place. Nor was it possible to put an accent above any vowels.

All manuscripts referred to (with the exception of four kept in the National Archive of Iceland) are preserved in the National Library of Iceland and are identified by their catalogue numbers.

ABBREVIATIONS

Agrip af Thjodverjasogum	Thjodv.s.
Arbaekur Islands i sogu-formi	Arb.Isl.
Armann a Althingi	AaA
Brot ur sogu Islands	Br.sg.Isl.
Chronologiae Tentament edur Tima-Tals Registurs Agrip fra Upphafi allra Skapadra hluta til vorra daga	Chron.Tent.
Danakonungasogur	Danak.s.
Eftirmaeli hinnar Atjandu Aldar eptir Krists hingad burd fra Ey-konunni Islandi	Eft.atj.ald.
Fuldstaendige Efterretninger om de udi Island ildsprudende Bierge, deres Beliggende og de Virkninger som ved Jordbrandene paa adskillige Tider ere foraarsagede	Fuldst.Eft.
Hunvetningasaga	Hunv.
Island i det Attende Aarhundrede historisk-politisk skildret	Isl.Att.Aarh.
Islenzk sagnablod	Isl.sbl.
Islands timatal, litid aukid	Isl.tim.
Kennslu-Bok i Sagna-Fraedinni	Ken.Sagn.
Kirkjusaga. Agrip (first version, Lbs.947-8, 4to.)	Kkjs.A
Kirkjusaga. Agrip (second version, IB.157-8, 4to.)	Kkjs.B
Klausturposturinn	Klp.

Mannfaekkun af hallaerum	Mannf.hall.
Minnisverd tidindi	Minn.tid.
Noget tilforladeligt om Islaenderne	Nog.tilf.Isl.
Nokkurs konar corollarium - um byggingu a Islandi fyrir sogutima, med aettartolu og timatali	Nok.kon.cor.
Norduralfusaga fra thjodflutningunum til 1800	Nord.s.
Persakronikur	Persakr.
Rationalisterne og deres Forhold til Kristendommen	Rat.For.Krist.
Raedur Hjalmars a Bjargi fyrir Bornum sinum um Fremd, kosti og annmarka allra Stetta og theirra almennustu Gjold og Tekjur	Rae.Hj.Bj.
Skagfirdingasaga	Skagf.
Sogur af Petri czar, Katrinu drottningu, Russakeisurum nokkrum og Pali I	Sgr.Pe.cz.
Sogur fornra Norduralfubua	Sgr.fo.No.

CHAPTER 1

ICELAND IN THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT (c.1760 - c.1830)

(1) The country and an outline of its history down to c.1760.

Iceland, with an area of 103,000 square kilometres, is the second largest island in Europe, somewhat larger than Ireland. It is mountainous and barren: only about one quarter of its total area lies below 200 metres above sea level, and the area which has a continuous plant cover - only about 1% of the country is woodland - is similar in size (the two areas are, in fact, to a large extent the same). The Arctic Circle touches the northernmost part of the mainland, but the climate is less severe than the latitude would suggest, thanks to the Gulf Stream. The climate is thus cold temperate and oceanic: the summers are short and cool while the winters are relatively mild (the mean January temperature in Reykjavik is -0.6°C or 31°F).

Iceland is poor in natural resources in the conventional sense; minerals have not been found there in large quantities. But as the country is at the convergence of warm and cold ocean currents the banks around the coast are among the richest fishing grounds in the world. Fish products constitute some 90% of the exports. There are good pastures in Iceland and high quality grass can be cultivated there. The farmers derive their income mostly from the keeping of livestock; they sell milk and lamb. The country is self-sufficient in meat and dairy produce. Light industries and transport have attracted an increasing number of people in recent years, but heavy industry is as yet on a limited scale, although abundant hydroelectric power could be provided

for it - a source of energy that has already played a large part in the transformation of Icelandic society.

Before attempting to survey Icelandic history chronologically one may try to point out some of its outstanding features - the basic factors to be borne in mind when dealing with the subject.

First, although many Icelandic historians have been too inclined to regard the history of the country as an unique phenomenon, it cannot be denied that the physical isolation of Iceland was an important influence. The shortest distance between Iceland and Greenland is 287 kilometres. The Faroe Islands are 430 kilometres away, Scotland 798 kilometres, Norway some 990 kilometres. Although the fishing grounds and the possibilities of trading attracted people from other countries than Norway and Denmark from the fifteenth century onwards, the distance factor has limited intercourse between Iceland and the outside world. Because of it, for instance, the number of ships which sailed between Iceland and Norway and later Denmark was often kept down to a minimum, and normally each ship sailed to Iceland only once a year. And as Iceland was not very important strategically until the present century, foreign powers were not strongly tempted to try to occupy the country even if they had considerable interests there.

Then it should be emphasized that the saying that Iceland is "on the fringe of the inhabitable world" is not without meaning. Most other peoples who live in Arctic Circle regions are either

nomads or hunters. It would be possible for the Icelanders to earn a living as farmers, but only just, and climatic fluctuations have helped shape the evolution of the history of the country to an unusually large extent. The mean temperature of the warmest month of the year (July) in Reykjavik is only about 11°C (52°F), and the mean summer temperature in the northerly coastal areas is not much above what is needed for the reasonably successful cultivation of grass. The present century, with the perhaps significant exception of the last few years, has witnessed a marked amelioration of the climate, but it is almost certain that the mean annual temperature was higher in the Commonwealth period. The glaciers then covered a much smaller area than they did later and barley was grown with success in many districts. There are indications of increased severity of the climate as early as the thirteenth century, and the period c.1600-c.1900 has been called the "Little Ice Age" of the northern hemisphere. By 1600 the Icelanders no longer grew barley (the opportunity of importing cheap grain in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is hardly a sufficient explanation for this) and the glaciers moved forward to reach their maximum extent in the 1750s and again in the 1840s. A minor drop in the average annual temperature meant a very considerable increase in the number of bad harvests and of the winters when the quantity of hay intended for the sheep was not sufficient to ensure their survival. Drift-ice now blocked the north and northeast coasts fairly frequently in winter and spring, sometimes for months on end, and occasionally even in the

summer. This naturally affected the weather. The climatic changes, moreover, together with the destruction of the birch-woods that covered the lowlands and the frequent volcanic eruptions, helped bring about large-scale soil erosion.

Economic stagnation after c.1200 (and even retrogression in the early modern period) is an important element in Icelandic history. The pattern of rural settlement was always one of single farms, and there were no separate classes of fishermen, craftsmen, or native merchants. During the trading boom of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Icelandic farmers, fearing an increase in the number of itinerant beggars and the disruption of society as a whole, initiated certain measures aimed at preventing the establishment of seaside villages, which helped delay this development until the eighteenth century when Reykjavik ceased to be just a summer trading station.

It should be borne in mind that the first settlers came to a virgin country[1] where they could to a certain extent live as food gatherers. But vegetation and animal life (this applies especially to the fresh water fauna; there were no big wild land animals in the country) very soon declined. This serves to explain why sheep farming reached its peak already in the Commonwealth period and cattle farming rather declined later on. Icelandic agriculture became less diversified. In the course of time the Icelanders gave up the growing of not only barley, but also of flax. The Icelanders also stopped keeping pigs and domestic fowl and the practice of horticulture ceased. At the same time they

kept on collecting food and other useful materials wherever they could.

By 1830 the farming methods were still those of the Commonwealth, and fishing methods were also primitive: small rowboats and hand lines were used for the most part. The backwardness of the country and lack of progress for centuries can be illustrated by the facts that in the early nineteenth century there were no roads, just tracks trodden by horses, virtually no bridges, and no regular coastal shipping services; all transport was by horseback. The later nineteenth and beginning of twentieth centuries were a period of progress in many ways, but the full impact of modern technology was not felt until the British and American occupation of 1940 and 1941.

Finally, it must be remembered how small the Icelandic nation has always been, and events in the history of the country may often seem to be of Lilliputian dimensions. This factor has contributed to the Icelanders' interest in genealogy and in the lives of individual persons, but it has made them reluctant to make generalizations concerning their history; they have often not been able to see the wood for the trees. These matters are dealt with later in the thesis.

Contemporary scholars' estimates of the population in the late Commonwealth period vary from some 60,000 to between 70,000 and 80,000 (in the past figures as high as 120,000 were put forward); there were definite limits to how many could live in the country, given its economy.[2] Frequent famine and natural dis-

asters kept the population down. In 1703, according to the first census, only 50,000 people lived in Iceland. The population declined to below 40,000 on occasions in the eighteenth century, but it has been growing almost continuously since 1785 although not at the same rate as in the neighbouring countries until this century. Numbering just over 200,000, the Icelanders are at the present day one of the very smallest nations to form an independent state. That this is so may basically be attributed to their keeping their own separate language and a sense of national identity even in the bleak periods of their history.

Since c.1270 the settlement of Iceland has been dated back to 874 A.D. It is possible that seafarers had come to the country much earlier, but the evidence is not conclusive. In the late eighth and ninth centuries Irish hermits lived in Iceland, but apparently there were very few of them, and they left after the pagan settlers began to arrive. These came mostly from west Norway and from the parts of the British Isles dominated by the Vikings; the Celtic element was in all likelihood considerable.[3] Because of the particular political and economic conditions in Norway the influx of settlers was rapid, and after a few decades all the coastal areas had been settled.

The need for a political organization was soon felt, and in 930 the Icelandic Commonwealth was established. Its power structure was unique. There was not only no single sovereign, but also no national executive power; the execution of punishments was in the hands of the grieved party and society at large.

Judicial and legislative powers were invested in the godi (see glossary), who presided over the godord (chieftaincy). After 965 these numbered 39. The godord was not an absolute inalienable unit, but was based on a mutual agreement between the godi and his farmer clients. The godar wielded judicial power in their districts and at the Althing, the national parliament, held at Thingvellir for a fortnight every summer (see glossary), legislative power in the Althing (in its logretta - see glossary), and executive power in so far they were obliged to help their clients obtain their rights. All the godar were constitutionally regarded as equals, but as the office of godi could be bought and sold as well as inherited, the political equilibrium was endangered with the passing of time. But despite occasional feuds between the chieftains, the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries were on the whole a peaceful period. There were probably no more than 10,000 people in the country in 930,[4] but in a surprisingly short period Iceland seems to have been fully occupied. Greenland was colonized from Iceland in the late tenth century, and colonization of the American mainland (Vinland) was attempted, unsuccessfully, in the early eleventh century. Famine was rare until the late twelfth century. Slavery, very important in the tenth century, died out in the twelfth century; the causes of this are to be sought in the development of the Icelandic economy and that of Icelandic society.[5]

Christian influences became strong in Iceland in the late tenth century as the result of missionary activity. Religious

disputes threatened to split the Commonwealth, and the Althing decided in 1000[6] that all Icelanders should be Christian. The process after that was peaceful. Two bishoprics were established, that of Skalholt in the South in 1056, that of Holar in the North in 1106; from the late tenth century to the late eleventh century several missionary and itinerant bishops are known to have stayed in Iceland. The Church gained financial security by means of the tithe laws of 1096, but the boundary between lay and ecclesiastical power in the country was not drawn definitely until the late thirteenth century. Several monasteries and two nunneries were founded, most of them in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The introduction of Christianity brought Iceland in close contact with the international culture of Christendom, and many of the famous Icelandic writers of the period were ecclesiastics.

Originally Iceland belonged to the archbishopric of Bremen, in 1104 the country came under Lund, but when the archbishopric of Nidaros (Trondheim) was established in 1152, Iceland was included. The Norwegian archbishops soon began to interfere in Icelandic church affairs. Iceland had become dependent on Norwegian merchants as far as trade was concerned, and the lay rulers of Norway had for long been interested in Iceland. The political balance in Iceland was disrupted in the early thirteenth century: six leading families now shared all the political power in the country. The Age of the Sturlungs (one of these families - see glossary), 1220-64, a period of upheaval and civil war, was the

culmination of a long process. The chieftains sought help in the political struggle in Norway and some of them gave their allegiance to King Hakon IV, the Old, who used them cunningly as pawns in his own game. It is also important that for several years after 1238 the episcopal sees were occupied by Norwegians, who supported the authority of the king. In 1262-64 the Icelanders submitted to the authority of the king on the basis of a bilateral agreement, which laid down that this was a confederate union and that the Norwegians were to satisfy the Icelanders' need for foreign goods. The Icelanders were to pay the king taxes, but he was to let them enjoy peace and Icelandic laws.

The Union brought peace to Iceland, but otherwise the pattern of life in the country did not change much for the time being. Icelanders were appointed to the sees for a considerable period, but from the early fourteenth century to the later fifteenth century many unscrupulous foreign adventurers occupied these positions. The administrative structure was changed. The godar were succeeded by syslumenn (see glossary), who were in charge of fixed areas, the syslur (counties), and who, as officials of the crown, were appointed by the king. New legal codes, Jarnsida (1271) and Jonsbok (1280) (see glossary) were introduced, and royal stewards (named hirdstjorar (see glossary) until the Reformation, hofudsmenn (see glossary) from then to 1683) were appointed to look after the kings' interests in the country. The Icelanders were on their guard against any encroachment upon their liberties and rose on occasions against the representatives of

foreign power. Some traits of the semi-feudal system in Norway are discernible in Iceland in this period, and now a privileged class came into being in the country - families who amassed wealth, especially after the disastrous Black Death of 1402-04 and the subsequent social and economic changes. Iceland came to be controlled by the Danish Crown as a part of the Norwegian monarchy in 1380, then fell formally under the sovereignty of the Danish Crown with the Union of Kalmar (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) in 1397. And in the fifteenth century Iceland began to play, for the first time, a significant role in international relations.

The English Merchant Adventurers were attracted by the possibilities of trade with and fishing around Iceland; the first reference to their presence there is in 1412. The Danes were unable to control affairs in Iceland effectively, but they protested against the trade that the English carried on in the country despite the king's prohibition, which infuriated the Bergen merchants, and the outrages that the English committed. Since the measures taken by the English kings to bring the Iceland traffic to an end were unsuccessful (and apparently sometimes lukewarm), the state of tension continued. In 1469 hostilities broke out between Denmark-Norway and England because of this, but an agreement was reached in 1474. In the meantime (1430-40), Hanseatic merchants had begun to sail to Iceland, and soon rivalry developed between them and the English, which resulted in severe clashes. The Icelandic economy benefited from

this complex situation: the Icelanders found good markets for their staple export, dried fish, while imports, such as corn from the Baltic, were plentiful and cheap.

The reign of Christian III of Denmark (1536-59) was a most eventful period for Iceland. Supported by Icelandic partisans, the king succeeded eventually, after a fierce struggle with the Catholics, in introducing the Lutheran religion. The execution of the Catholic bishop of Holar in 1550 was an epoch-making event. After this the Icelanders experienced for the first time what it was like to be a colonial nation; they were deprived of a considerable part of their wealth. All monastic property was gradually appropriated, together with some of the Church's properties and its sources of revenue. This was one way of increasing the royal revenue from the country; the other was to put the entire Icelandic trade in Danish hands. So far the Danes had managed to prevent the establishment only of permanent foreign settlements; now stricter measures were taken to this effect and Danish merchants began to sail to Iceland. The Hamburgers were reluctant to give up the Icelandic trade, but it became a Danish monopoly in 1602, and intercourse with foreign merchants was forbidden under heavy penalties. Some smuggling (and piracy, for that matter) was carried on, however, by the Germans, the English, and the Dutch in the more isolated regions.

The Icelandic nation passed through severe ordeals because of the trade monopoly, which was accompanied by a deterioration in the climate. Prices of imported goods rose drastically while

about the same as before was paid for native products, and the division of the country into several trading districts was economically disadvantageous. The life of most of the people was a desperate struggle for survival whereas the old upper class families declined. The most positive aspect of life in the country was a literary awakening in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although what was printed was mainly religious material it was important that this was in Icelandic. Continental humanism came to influence Icelandic culture deeply; its effect on historiography is described in Chapter 2.

But despite the fact that cultural life in Iceland was in some ways surprisingly rich, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries constitute the saddest period in the history of the country. The penal laws were extremely harsh, just as they were in Denmark, and some twenty people were burnt for alleged witchcraft in the period 1625-90. The Absolute Monarchy was accepted by the Icelanders in 1662 (in Denmark the process of establishing the absolute monarchy took a few years; the Royal Law or King's Law, which laid down the unrestricted power of the now hereditary monarchy, became final in 1665) and a new system of administration introduced between 1683 and 1688. The authorities often spoke of the need to make a systematic effort to improve the lot of the nation, but the Government did not do much about this. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, the Danes appointed an increasing number of Icelanders to key posts, and people of both nationalities became increasingly aware that it was possible to lift Iceland out of the rut, that reforms could be carried out

and material progress made. This attitude became especially prevalent after the middle of the century when the impact of the Enlightenment on Danish political and social thought was markedly felt; the ideology of the physiocrats and that of Enlightened Despotism in general gained currency. The work done by Skuli Magnusson (1711-1794) and others in the 1750s and later, which was aimed at diversifying the economy and improving the existing sources of livelihood, is important in this respect. Although these attempts largely failed, things could never be the same again for the country as a whole and especially for Reykjavik, which had grown into a village.

(2) Administration in the Age of Enlightenment

The absolute monarch naturally stood at the topø of the administrative hierarchy. He wielded legal and the supreme judicial power and appointed directly the most important officials. Under the auspices of absolution the administration had become increasingly centralized (even though at the same time the structure of political power in Denmark was far from being static). This meant the growth of bureaucracy. The king's closest advisers were usually the leaders of the various administrative departments. The governmental departments in Copenhagen which controlled Icelandic affairs were the rentekammer (the finances, commerce) and the kancelli[7] (judicial affairs and administration).

According to the system of 1683-88, the finances of the country were to be supervised by the landfogeti (see glossary). This official was in charge of the royal estates, trade and fish-

ing, and collected the taxes. The stiftamtmadur (see glossary) was in charge of the general administration and had judicial authority in cases concerning the church. As the stiftamtmadur was originally not resident in the country, his powers were delegated to a single amtmadur (see glossary). Changes were made in 1770, and again in 1783 and 1787. Now the stiftamtmadur lived in Iceland and was as well the amtmadur of one of the three omt (the plural of amt), that of the South; the other two were that of the West and that of the North and the East. This system was in force until 1873. The first Icelanders to be appointed to the offices of landfogeti and amtmadur were Skuli Magnusson (in 1750) and Magnus Gislason (1704-1764) (in 1752), respectively. After that several Icelanders were appointed to these offices.

The Althing completely ceased to participate in legislation at the beginning of the eighteenth century and became essentially a high court, presided over by two Icelandic logmenn (see glossary), appointed by the king. The prestige of the Althing steadily diminished and conditions at Thingvellir went from bad to worse. In 1800 it was decided to abolish it. It was replaced by a high court in Reykjavik, the landsyfirrettur, for a third of a century presided over by Magnus Stephensen, the most outstanding personality of the period (see Chapter 10). However, many soon regretted this development, and, furthermore, the Icelanders were not satisfied with their share in the advisory assemblies of Frederick VI in the early 1830s - two out of seventy delegates to the assembly of the Danish islands. They wanted

a national parliament, which was to be at least an advisory body to the sovereign. And in 1845 the Althing was re-established in Reykjavik on these lines.

The country was divided into 21 districts, syslur, on the late thirteenth century pattern, within which the syslumenn exercised judicial power. The smallest administrative unit was the hreppur (see glossary), an institution which dates back to the Commonwealth and which, like the sysla, still exists. In 1703 there were 164 hreppar in the country. These units, it should be noted, were not necessarily the same as the parishes, which numbered somewhat more.

As for the question of how much autonomy Iceland enjoyed in practice under the absolute monarchy, one finds that this was very limited. To be sure, in some fields such as local government the Icelanders were largely left alone to carry on their own affairs within the framework of the existing system. But they could not introduce any major changes on their own; the initiative had to come from Denmark.

(3) Social and economic conditions

The basic social and economic unit in Iceland in the Enlightenment period was the single farm. It must be emphasized how sparsely populated the country was. There were about 4,500 farms in the country, about half of which were privately owned, mostly by freehold proprietors, while a sixth belonged to the Crown.[8] Since many of the farms were shared between two or more farmers the number of these was in the region of 7,000. Apart

from the farmers' families there were many farmhands and maid-servants resident on the farms, and there was always a number of paupers and often a number of itinerant beggars. The norm was that the farm was largely a self-sufficient economic unit: what was obtained from the outside world was kept down to a minimum. Fishing was the main source of livelihood of many seaside farmers, who often exchanged goods with the inland farmers, but practically the whole working population was associated with farming in one way or another - even the officials, lay and ecclesiastical. (This applies to Jon Espolin and most of the other historians of the 1790-1830 period who were resident in Iceland and who are dealt with in the thesis). There was hardly any room for specialists.

The bulk of the population in the eighteenth century usually lived not far above the starvation level. People lived in miserable sod hovels where conditions were extremely unhygienic. The first learned physician of the country began to work there in 1760 and although there were six public physicians by the end of the century these made up a very inadequate force. Epidemics often spread and were a decisive factor, as well as famine and natural disasters, in a population decline of some 25% in the period 1703 -1785. On three occasions the population sank below 40,000 (the lowest since the tenth century with the possible exception of the period immediately after the (early fifteenth century) Black Death) in the aftermath of a smallpox epidemic in the 1700s, following a number of bad years in the 1750s, and in the wake of

the calamities which resulted from a gigantic volcanic eruption at Lakagigir, south-west of Vatnajokull, in 1783. In 1801, however, the population had risen to c.47,000 and in 1835 to c.56,000, at a time when the population of the Danish Monarchy (i.e. Denmark at the present day minus North Slesvig) was some 925,000, that of Copenhagen 101,000, but that of all the territories ruled by the Danish king some 2.2 million.[9] By that time, Iceland was still predominantly rural, with about 600 people in Reykjavik and some tiny seaside villages, the existence of which was based on trade and fishing, emerging.

Climatic conditions were instrumental in determining the state of agriculture. The period 1758-77 was rather favourable. This was followed by a period of bad weather between 1777 and 1786, but then things were reasonably good for the remainder of the century with the exception of the early nineties. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century there were frequent bad years, but in the twenties the situation was somewhat better.

The most important domestic animal was the sheep. Besides producing meat and dairy products people reared sheep for their clothing, which was for the most part made of wool, and also for producing goods for export. In the 1760s a scab disease spread through most of the country with disastrous consequences. There were some 357,000 head of sheep in 1760, but only c.140,000 in 1770.[10] The surviving sheep in the infected areas were then slaughtered and replaced with healthy ones with the effect that in 1783 the number of sheep had risen to 236,000. But after the

volcanic eruption, when the atmosphere was mingled with poisonous substances that affected the vegetation of the whole country severely and caused animal diseases (mainly fluorite poisoning), the number dropped to 49,000 in the course of one year. During that year the number of cattle fell from 21,000 to 10,000 and the number of horses from 36,000 to 9,000. And it is estimated that in a couple of years, 1783-85, there was a population decline of c.9000 or 19%. This was followed by a smallpox epidemic in 1786 which caused the death of 1,500 people. The country recovered suprisingly quickly, however, and by 1800 animal husbandry was back to normal. Then there were 307,000 head of sheep, 23,000 head of cattle, and 28,000 horses. These figures did not change very much during the next thirty years.

The impact of physiocracy and the Icelanders' enhanced consciousness of the plight of their country resulted in a lively debate on farming and farming reform in the late eighteenth century. The government took various measures in this field. Attempts at crossbreeding sheep were made (English rams brought the scab disease to the country, but this activity stimulated interest in improvement of animal husbandry); the landsnefnd ("country committee" - see glossary) of 1770 (a committee of two Danes and an Icelander, who were to make a report on the economic conditions in the country and the possibilities of improving the lot of the nation) concerned itself primarily with agricultural problems and consequently decrees were issued dealing with the establishment of new farms and ways of improving the cultivation

of the soil. These measures did not directly lead to much change in Icelandic agriculture, but together with the support which Det kongelige danske Landhusholdningsselskab (the Royal Danish Agricultural Society) gave to Icelandic farmers and the publication of various essays on farming they marked the beginning of a movement which did not fully materialize until after our period although, for instance, vegetable gardening (especially the growing of potatoes) gained ground. The setback after 1783 (known as the Moduhardindi - see glossary) and the bad seasons and warfare in the early nineteenth century, accompanied by serious lack of imported goods, checked material progress. People now had to live off the land to an even greater extent than before; Icelandic moss, berries, and dulse were utilized as far as possible.

Under these circumstances fishing was pursued more energetically than before and sharks and seals were caught in large numbers, but no changes were made in the methods employed.

Various companies had been in charge of the Iceland trade. The Crown itself had taken it over from 1759 to 1763 when it was granted to Det almindelige Handels-Compagnie (the General Commercial Company). Its commercial policy was oppressive, and Skuli Magnusson rallied the Icelanders to the defence of their rights. In 1774 the Crown took over the trade again, but free trade ideas were now gaining acceptance, and in 1787 commerce with Iceland was made free to all Danish-Norwegian subjects. Six ports were chartered as trading stations, but two of these were soon dropped and

none became significant in the Enlightenment period except Reykjavik. In fact, trading conditions did not improve much as long as there was no competition from merchants from outside the realm of the Danish king and the Icelanders were too poor to engage in overseas trade.

After the bombardment of Copenhagen in 1807, Danish trade with Iceland was interrupted. The British government took a great deal of interest in Iceland although this did not have important political consequences. Commercial peace and freedom of trade with Iceland was established in 1809, but the imports of the English merchants (a few American ships came to Iceland as well) did not supply the population's needs.

An interesting event took place in 1809. Then a Danish adventurer, Jorgen Jorgensen (known to the Icelanders as Jorundur hundadagakonungur) came to Iceland on an English vessel and assumed control over the country - it has been argued that Iceland, in reality, became an independent state from the point of view of international law with Jorgensen a kind of Lord Protector[11] - claiming to be backed by the British government. He was, however, deported by the British after a few weeks' stay.

When the Danish trade was resumed after the Napoleonic War the regulations of 1787 were made more flexible. There had been galloping inflation in the war years, but after a currency reform had been carried out in Denmark (the Icelandic currency was Danish) in 1815 the situation went back to normal. Overseas trade increased in the years that followed. In 1830 fifty

merchantmen came to Iceland, carrying 2,200 tons gross, while before 1787 the annual number of ships sailing to Iceland averaged thirty and in 1809 only thirteen ships came there.[12] Not until 1854 were all nations allowed to trade with Iceland without restrictions; trade with Britain soon became considerable. This proved to be a great filip to the Icelandic economy.

Even at the best of times the volume of trade with Iceland per head of population was very small. The main articles of export in the period under review were fish, mainly salted and dried, train-oil, tallow, and wool. The export of knitted articles was on the decrease whereas that of raw wool increased greatly. As for imports, foodstuffs, mostly grain, doubled in the period 1784-1840. Iron and steel, salt, hemp, and coal were other basic import commodities. It is significant that import of coffee and sugar is not mentioned in the records until 1772, but the consumption of these goods and other "luxuries" rose at a great rate; the Icelandic people became heavy coffee-drinkers. In the early nineteenth century the population at large gradually adopted Danish styles in clothing, having hitherto dressed according to their native style.[13]

(4) The Church

The outstanding features of ecclesiastical life in the period are, in the first place, the abolition of the old bishoprics and establishment of a new one, covering the whole country, and, in the second place, a struggle between orthodoxy and rationalism.

After the Reformation the bishops' seats were to an even larger extent than before the cultural centres of the country. The two Latin schools were cathedral ones, and as each of the two bishops' sees owned some 300 farms - c.7% of the land - they played an important part in the country's economy. Until their decline the bishops' seats can be described as tiny villages, but owing to their geographical position there was never any possibility of their developing into towns. But it is significant that people in the North spoke of going "home to Holar".

Some of the Lutheran bishops were outstanding scholars, but the spirit of the Church was very dogmatic as can be judged from the sermons of Jon Vidalin (1666-1720), the famous early eighteenth century bishop at Skalholt. The church attendance of the masses was rigorously watched over. Pietism, however, did not make much impact on religious life in Iceland. This was a movement which originated in Germany at the end of the seventeenth century and which had its heyday in Denmark in the reign of Christian VI (1730-46). It stressed the "practice of godliness", laid emphasis on the Bible as the source and norm of religious life, and sharply criticized the state-controlled Christianity of the Church. However, supranaturalism, a movement which was relatively successful in Denmark, coming there from Germany after 1750, and which endeavoured to prove that the Christian revelation was not contrary to reason, was of considerable importance in Iceland. One of its followers was Bishop Hannes Finnsson (see Chapter 9). In the late century the Church was out of necessity preoccupied with secular affairs.

The bishops were in charge of the finances of bishops' sees, in addition to spiritual matters, and they ran the Latin schools as well. The system of financing the bishops' sees had been adequate in the past but their income was diminished severely by the eighteenth century calamities and both the bishops' sees were in severe financial straits; the schools suffered gravely from this. Then an earthquake, accompanying the volcanic eruption of 1783, destroyed the buildings at Skalholt. As it was bound to be difficult to continue there, the bishop's office and the school were removed to Reykjavik. A cathedral was built there, but the first few Reykjavik bishops resided for the most part in the neighbourhood of the town. The bishopric of Holar, where a stone cathedral had been completed in 1763, one of the first durable buildings to be erected in Iceland (the others dating from about the same time are associated with Skuli Magnusson), was abolished in 1801. The authorities thought that the financial disorder of the see could not be remedied.

Seen in perspective, these institutional changes were beneficial neither to higher education nor to ecclesiastical finance. But the selling of the estates of the bishops' sees benefited the peasantry, and these changes together with the new trade regulations and the abolition of the Althing and the establishment of the landsyfirrettur, contributed to the emergence of Reykjavik as the undisputed centre of the country.

Religious rationalism spread gradually in Denmark in the first half of the eighteenth century and became predominant in

the second half, the main outside influences being the "free thought" in France and the rationalism of the German universities. In Iceland the movement gained ground in the late eighteenth century, and at the turn of the century the Icelandic rationalists, led by Magnus Stephensen, took the offensive against religious orthodoxy. The catechism written by Pontoppidan, the famous Danish bishop and historian, published in 1741, was replaced by one by the more liberal bishop Balle. A new hymn-book was published and a new form of church singing and new melodies were introduced. The core of the old hymn-book dated back to the late sixteenth century as did a collection of choral melodies for the Lutheran hymns known as grallarinn (from Graduale). These were sung without accompaniment. The only musical instruments played in the country were the violin and the langspil (an Icelandic stringed instrument - see glossary). People used to sing a great deal, but knew rather little of the art of music. Magnus Stephensen was a pioneer in introducing the organ into the country and the second Icelander to write about the theory of music, in an appendix to the hymn-book. That book was a thorn in the flesh of many people because of the rationalistic flavour of the hymns (the failure to mention the Devil was complained about, for instance) and also because of their poor literary quality.

And a rationalistic book of family sermons, published in 1822, did not meet with much success. Jon Vidalin's sermons (in a book popularly called Vidalinspostilla) were much more popular among the population at large. In fact, it does not seem as if

the attitude of the masses towards religion changed profoundly despite the new currents of thought among the intelligentsia, including the bishops, who were liberal if not committed to rationalism. Many clergymen had orthodox views on religion, which was very important at grass-roots level. This attitude was confirmed by the arrival of orthodox divinity graduates from Copenhagen University in the 1830s when the influence of rationalism was waning.

(5) Education

Elementary education was traditionally the concern of the homes, of the farmers themselves. In the sixteenth century foreigners are known to have expressed surprise at the high rate of literacy in Iceland. One of the reasons for this was the fact that there was a large number of manuscripts in circulation, from which many people learned how to read, even for a long time after the printing of books began in the country. In the early eighteenth century, however, the bishops were complaining that illiteracy was a hindrance to religious instruction. But the first reliable figures concerning literacy date from the 1740s, when the Danish pietist Ludvig Harboe was sent on a mission to Iceland. He estimated that a considerable majority of adults in the Holar diocese knew how to read, but just below 50% in the Skalholt diocese. In the 1740s decrees were issued concerning confirmation and religious instruction and visitations of the clergy to the farms. As a result of these and Harboe's mission on the whole interest in popular education grew (measures taken by the Danish

government in this sphere in the 1760-1830 period were of little consequencefor Iceland). Although the first elementary school to last for any considerable length of time was not established until 1793, there is evidence that after the middle seventeenth century a considerable majority of confirmed children could read, and in the course of time almost every adult person who was not mentally retarded could do so. As will be seen later in the thesis, a relatively high number of Icelanders, who had had little formal instruction, as well as educated men, were engaged in scholarly activities of some kind.

King Christian III laid down in 1552 that the Latin schools at Skalholt and at Holar were to be continued. There were to be 40 pupils at Skalholt and 24 at Holar, but often the numbers were somewhat lower than this. Many of the headmasters were able men, but both the teaching staff and the pupils suffered from bad housing and the latter often were not adequately fed. According to the school regulations of 1743 the curriculum of the two classes in the schools consisted of Latin, Greek, theology, a survey of Hebrew, Icelandic, Danish, arithmetic, music, and history (European, Scandinavian, and Icelandic). The graduates were qualified to be ordained and continue their studies at a university. Pupils educated privately by theologians, especially those who had a university degree, and deemed by them to have reached the school graduates' standard, had the same rights and qualifications until 1830; they were also studentar (see glossary).

In 1785 the school at Skalholt was removed to Holavellin

a locality in Reykjavik where living conditions were wretched. Four years after the school at Holar had been united with the Holavallaskoli, a new grammar school for the whole country was founded at Bessastadir, near Reykjavik, where the hofudsmadur used to reside (and where the Icelandic presidential residence is now). The curriculum was organized on the same lines as in the old schools and the number of pupils ranged from thirty to forty. Some of the teachers, e.g. Sveinbjorn Egilsson, were distinguished scholars, who played, together with their pupils, an important role in the renaissance of national culture, particularly in that of the language, in the early nineteenth century. Therefore the Bessastadaskoli, discontinued in 1845 when a grammar school was founded in Reykjavik, occupies an important place in Icelandic history.

It is known that in the Middle Ages some Icelanders were educated in France, Britain, and Germany. The champions of the Icelandic Reformation were educated in Northern Germany, but after the mid-sixteenth century Icelandic students who went abroad studied at Copenhagen University, which was founded in 1479. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Icelandic students were indeed seldom found at universities other than that of Copenhagen where many of them studied divinity. From the early eighteenth century onwards some read law and a few read medicine, classics and the natural sciences. In the seventeenth century 180 Icelandic students enrolled at Copenhagen University, and 297 in the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, after the Napoleonic Wars, the influx of Icelandic students

increased somewhat. The Copenhagen students, Hafnarstudentar (see glossary), were in a way the elite of society. Many of them, especially in the late eighteenth century, won various honours in Denmark, and they often proceeded to occupy the highest lay and ecclesiastical posts in Iceland. As Denmark was the essential link between Iceland and the outside world it was the Hafnarstudentar who introduced the new ideas of the period into Iceland. In reality, there were not many people in the country, apart from them, who could read the modern European languages; no dictionary covering these had been printed there. German was most widely known, but knowledge of English and, especially, of French was on the increase.

(6) Aspects of the arts: learned societies, books, and periodicals

Icelandic culture in the Age of Enlightenment must be seen in its Danish context. Intellectual currents from the outside world that reached Iceland came predominantly from or through Denmark (intellectual developments in Iceland always lagged considerably behind those in most European countries). It can be said that Denmark was on the periphery of the Enlightenment, but Danish culture in the later eighteenth century was very cosmopolitan and embodied many features of the Enlightenment in Western and Central Europe. As during most of the modern period, German influences on Danish culture was particularly strong; it was important that the Danish court was very Germanized at this time.

The establishment of the learned Icelandic societies dealt

with below and their publications must be considered against the background of Danish societies which were intended to promote videnskaberne in general (the Danish word videnskab (cf. Wissenschaft in German) is applicable to all branches of human knowledge and is as such not equivalent to science in English. The Danes speak of de humane videnskaber (the arts) and naturvidenskaberne (the natural sciences)) and the development of the Danish press, which influenced Icelandic culture directly and indirectly. In Denmark, the first society of this kind, which helped organize the publication of masses of videnskabeligt material and launched videnskabelige expeditions, was Det Kongelige Videnskabernes Selskab (The Royal "Scientific" Society) founded in 1742. Selskabet til det danske Sprogs og Histories forbedring (The Society of Improvement of the Danish Language and Danish History) was established in 1745, partly as a reaction to the aristocratic complexion of the former. Later Selskabet til de skonne og nyttige Videnskabernes Forfremmelse (The Society of Promotion of the Fine and Useful Arts) came into being. All these societies rendered valuable services to Danish culture.

As urbanization proceeded the Danish press got off the ground, even though the censorship that existed under the absolute monarchy (with the exception of the period 1771-73) was naturally a serious handicap to the publication of periodicals as well as of books. Various popular newspapers were published in Copenhagen and in the larger provincial towns. In 1720 the first learned periodical was founded, and after 1744 a series

of journals was published where the burning issues of the day, political, social, and cultural were discussed. The increased freedom of the press meant that it became more and more the forum of the intelligentsia and, together with books, which were now published in an increasing number, the medium through which new ideas were expressed. However, the 1790s, a critical time for the press, were a turning-point. The authorities - Crown Prince Frederick and his circle - were always suspicious of pro-revolutionary opinions, and the events of the decade hardened their attitude - a process which culminated in the strict censorship laws of 1799, as a result of which the press came to suffer an eclipse and the concept of public opinion became less valid. It should be noted, however, that at no time did censorship affect publications in Icelandic very much.

Danish historiography and its relation to Iceland are dealt with in the Chapter 13.

In 1750 there had been a printing press in Iceland for more than two centuries, but comparatively few non-religious books had been printed there. In the next few decades a revolution took place in this field. Despite the poverty of the nation and the difficulties in communications a few periodicals and a number of books, many of which were translated from various European languages, dealing with secular subjects were published in Iceland or in Icelandic in Copenhagen. This is one of the most palpable aspects of the Icelandic Enlightenment which lasted until c.1830; the second of its two stages began in the 1790s

when the Age of Enlightenment in Europe is usually taken to have come to an end. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards one finds, both among the Icelanders in Copenhagen and among the intelligentsia at home, much interest being taken in the material welfare of the nation and also in its history and literature. The ideals were sought in contemporary Europe as well as in the Icelandic past. Even though radical tendencies in the sphere of politics were practically lacking in Iceland - all the leading figures revered the Crown, and Enlightened Despotism was admired in the late eighteenth century - some prominent men, e.g. the poet and natural scientist Eggert Olafsson (1726-1768) and later the Romantics, were markedly nationalistic. But others, like Magnus Stephensen, most of whom had an upper class background, did not attach the same importance to national traditions and values and were very cosmopolitan in their outlook. The ferment in cultural life found expression in the formation of societies intended to work for the causes people believed in.

Apart from the associations of Icelandic students in Copenhagen, which functioned on a rather informal basis, the first society of this kind was the Osynilega felagid (The Invisible Society), founded about 1760 in the north of Iceland. Apparently the aim of the society was to publish medieval works, but nothing more was heard of it after 1768 the date of its only publication, that of Konungsskuggsja (Speculum Regale, a thirteenth century Norwegian work).

Then, in 1779, a group of Icelanders in Copenhagen established Hid islenzka laerdomslistafelag (The Icelandic Society of

Learned Arts - glossary). Its aim was to support all arts and sciences which could be of any consequence to Iceland. Its first president was Jon Eiriksson (1728-1787), an Icelander who had a high post in the Danish rentekammer. Until his death the society flourished, but then went downhill. In 1781-96 it published a periodical in fifteen volumes dealing with diverse material. The emphasis was on practical matters such as farming and fishing, and various branches of the natural sciences were written about for the first time in Icelandic. But poetry was also printed and the authors were concerned about the state of the Icelandic language; they set themselves rules for spelling, for instance. These works - later known as Gomlu felagsritin - were very popular and their influence upon the nation considerable.

In 1794 Hid islenzka Landsuppfraedingarfelag (The Icelandic Society for National Enlightenment - see glossary) was founded on Magnus Stephensen's initiative. It took over the only printing press in the Skalholt diocese which had been stationed on the island Hrappsey in Breidifjordur from 1772 to 1793. A number of books had been printed in Hrappsey on various subjects: agriculture, fishing, law, and theology, as well as history and literature. Moreover, Hrappsey claims the honour of having printed the first periodical in Iceland (the reports on the sessions of the Althing printed, with some intervals, annually since 1696 are in a different category). This was named Islandske Maanedstidender (Icelandic Monthly News) and appeared from 1773 to 1776. It was edited by the sheriff Magnus Ketilsson (1732-1803)

and published in Danish for Danish subscribers to the books printed in Hrappsey.

The Landsuppfraedingarfelag, on the other hand, published the first periodical on Iceland and in Icelandic, Minnisverd tidindi (Memorable News) from 1796 to 1806 (see Chapters 10 and 12). The society can be said to have kept to its aims, which were "to spread knowledge and encourage reading among all classes of the population by publishing good, select works which would instruct as well as entertain!"[14] The membership of the society, which for about thirty years enjoyed the privileged position of having the only printing press in the country, ran to as high as 1200, but its activity declined during the difficult war years. Magnus Stephensen was always the predominant influence on the society, and his personal tastes are reflected in its publications. He also published the monthly Klausturpostur inn (The Monastery Post; it was printed on the island Videy where there had been a monastery in Catholic times) (circulation 600-700), which contained news and articles on various subjects. Hannes Finnsson was one of the founders of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag, and Jon Espolin wrote for it.

Two foreigners, the Scottish Rev. Ebenezer Henderson and the famous Danish philologist Rasmus Christian Rask, can be called the originators of two societies, founded in 1816, which are still in existence: Hid islenzka Bibliufelag (The Icelandic Bible Society - see glossery) and the very important Hid islenzka Bokmenntafelag (The Literary Society of Iceland - see glossary), respect-

ively. The former supported a revision of earlier Icelandic translations of the Bible (the whole Bible was first published in Icelandic in 1584, by Gudbrandur Thorlaksson (1541/2-1627), the famous humanist bishop of Holar). The latter, which operated through two departments, in Reykjavik and Copenhagen, published big works as early as in the twenties: Old Icelandic ones, Espolin's Annals, and a large-scale geographical survey. It published foreign news annually (see Chapter 12) in Islenzk sagnablod (1817-27) and in Skirnir (1827-1905; this periodical is still published, but it is now a literary magazine). Working in a field related to that of the Literary Society was Det kongelige nordiske Oldskriftselskab[15] (The Royal Nordic Antiquarian Society), founded in Copenhagen in 1825, which gave Icelandic scholars the opportunity to edit several works in Old Norse.

The law student Baldvin Einarsson's (see Chapter 12) articles in the annual Armann a Althingi (Copenhagen, 1829-32) brought the political debate carried on by the Icelanders to a new stage - brought it up to date, one might say. Baldvin may be regarded as the forerunner of the poets, scholars and politicians (the so-called Fjolnismenn and Jon Sigurdsson and his circle) who dominated Icelandic intellectual life in Copenhagen in the late thirties and the forties and, in Jon's case, much longer. Thus Baldvin ushered in a new era.

Several learned men wrote treatises on law and theology, many of which were printed. Magnus Stephensen was adive in both

fields, and among others were the sheriff Magnus Keilsson and Parson Rev. Jon Jonsson (1759-1848), a teacher of Jon Espolin's, who after becoming acquainted with Ebenezer Henderson was supported by the Tract Society in London to translate and publish as many as 66 pamphlets on religious matters. And as indicated above, agriculture and economicswere two of the favourite topics of the period. A good deal was written about medical subjects as well. The historiography of the period is dealt with in later chapters.

We have seen above that the publication of books in and concerning Iceland, reached substantial proportions. But it must be emphasized that the population at large could not afford to buy many books; most farms just had the essential books on religion and perhaps a few others.[16] There were, of course, some good private libraries, e.g. those of Hannes Finnsson and Magnus Stephensen, but it was difficult even for those who were relatively well off to get hold of books, especially foreign ones. The libraries of the cathedral schools were small, and attempts to establish reading societies were not altogether successful although such as were founded bought some important foreign books which members borrowed.[17] In 1818 what is now the National Library of Iceland was founded on the initiative of the Danish lawyer Major Carl Chr. Rafn, but it functioned under difficult conditions at the beginning. There was no bookshop in the country, so if people wanted to obtain books in foreign languages they had to order them from Copenhagen.

(7) Belles-lettres

Poetry was predominant here. It is indeed remarkable how many Icelanders of every social level were in the habit of composing quatrains (ferskeytlur - see glossary). The type of poetry known as rimur (see glossary) the subject-matter of which was often themes from various old tales and which were intoned in a peculiar way, was still immensely popular and played an important part in the preservation of the Icelandic language, although its literary quality was usually low. But while native traditions were retained, new ideas were also evident. Eggert Olafsson is sometimes described as the first modern poet in Iceland, and certainly writing poems in the spirit of patriotism and physiocracy as he did was a novelty. The best late eighteenth century poet, however, was undoubtedly ~~Rev~~ Parson. Jon Thorlaksson (1744-1819). Apart from poems and quatrains he composed originally, he became famous for his translations of Pope (Essay on Man), Milton (Paradise Lost), and Klopstock (Messias).

In the early nineteenth century the Romantic movement gained ground in Iceland. Its foremost representative in the 1760-1830 period was Amtmadur Bjarni Thorarensen (1786-1841), who composed several poems about the beauty of his country and some brilliant commemorative ones. Sveinbjorn Egilsson (1791-1852) (see Chapter 12), a teacher at Bessastadir and later headmaster in Reykjavik, was also a good lyric poet, although his most important contributions were his translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Moreover, he was a prominent Old Norse scholar. By

1830 a few young poets, who soon won renown, had emerged.

The Icelandic novel and Icelandic drama date back to the late eighteenth century, but the first ventures in these fields were as a whole not successful. The most notable exception is the playwright Sigurdur Petursson (1759-1827), who wrote two comedies specially for the pupils of the Latin school at Holavellir. But it is thought that the Icelandic theatre originated in the festivals of the pupils of the cathedral school at Skalholt.[18]

(8) The Natural Sciences

Enthusiasm for the natural sciences was a distinctive feature of the Enlightenment. In Denmark, much interest was taken in the physical features (in the widest sense) of the country, and the natural sciences flourished after the middle of the eighteenth century. All the leaders of the Icelandic Enlightenment, most of whom were men of multiple talents, were interested in these disciplines.

The body of knowledge about Iceland, both about the country itself and its inhabitants, increased enormously in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many expeditions were sent to the country and several books written about it. The Royal Danish Scientific Society, or individual members of it, sponsored the first expeditions of this kind, that of the Dane Niels Horrebow in 1749-51 and those of the Icelanders Bjarni Palsson (1719-1779, the first principal physician of Iceland) and Eggert Olafsson in 1750 and 1752-57. The account of their journeys,

written in Danish and later translated into English, German, and French, was for a long time to come a standard work on the country and the nation.

After 1770 it was not only Danish explorers and scientists who visited Iceland; Britons (e.g. Sir Joseph Banks in 1772), Frenchmen and Germans came there as well. Some Icelanders also carried out important research, e.g. Olafur Olafsson (or Olavius, 1741-1788) and Sveinn Palsson (1762-1840). Olavius, one of the men behind Hrappseyjarprentsmidja, travelled around the country for a couple of years and published his findings concerning the physical features of the country and its economy in 1780. Sveinn studied medicine and natural history in Copenhagen and became a physician in Iceland. Undoubtedly a man of brilliant talent, he could not devote much time to research in the natural sciences and none of his works were published in his day. But his essay on the nature of glaciers, composed in 1795, surpassed everything which had been written on the subject previously.

By 1830, the flora of the country thanks to research sponsored, interalia, by the Royal Danish Scientific Society, and its fauna had, by the standards of the age, been reasonably well investigated and written about. But perhaps most important were the coastal surveys carried out by the Danish government, which not only contributed to the safety of coastal navigation but were also an essential factor in the making of the first reasonably exact map of Iceland in the 1840s.

(9) The Fine Arts

This subject reflects the backwardness of Iceland very well. Sophisticated architecture was non-existent in this period, and there were no professional artists, hardly any patronage, and no museums or art galleries. The only trained artist was ~~Rev.~~ Parson Saemundur Magnusson Holm (1749-1821), who studied drawing and painting at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen (incidentally, the father of the famous Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen was an Icelander). For all practical purposes, the works of art from the period can be described as folk art. People with artistic inclinations had to be content with local materials, and certainly often displayed remarkable skill in doing so as their embroidery and wood carvings show.

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CHAPTER 2

A SURVEY OF ICELANDIC HISTORIOGRAPHY DOWN TO THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

(1) Catholic Times

Introductory remarks

It can be asserted that knowledge of runes was not uncommon among the first generations of the Icelanders,[1] but no early Icelandic runic inscriptions have been preserved. The conversion to Christianity meant that the Icelanders became influenced by the international culture of Christendom. Some of them learned Latin and how to read and write Latin script and became acquainted with international literature. The age of writing in Iceland can be said to have begun in the third quarter of the eleventh century. But it must be emphasized here that literacy in Iceland was not limited to the clergy. Besides members of religious orders there was another class of Icelandic medieval historian: lawyers (*godar*, *logsogumenn* (see glossary), *logmenn*). They were of course influenced by Christian ideas, but they tended to be more realistic in their approach to history than some of the ecclesiastics.

Various factors favoured the development of Icelandic historiography. Already in the tenth century Icelanders became prominent as court poets in Norway; they composed skaldic poetry dealing with the deeds and achievements of the kings whom they served. This tradition continued down to the thirteenth century and provided historians with material which they could base their writings on. According to Snorri Sturluson, some contemporary

poetry dealing with each Norwegian king from Harold the Fair-haired (late ninth century) down to his own day (early thirteenth century) had been preserved.

The Althing also played, apparently, an important role in this development. It has been suggested that the source criticism of Ari the Learned and various other historians was based on the production of evidence at the Althing; the lawyers' technique of establishing the facts was applied to the source material.[2] The social function of the Althing, a meeting-place of a large number of people where news was exchanged and stories were told, is also important in this respect.

All the important church institutions, the sees, the monasteries, and the schools, were centres of learning and promoted Christian culture and thus fostered the writing of history. Individual chieftains also played an important role here, although patronage in the conventional sense was limited. It is certain that only few of the works dealing with the outside world were written specifically for a foreign audience. Some works smack heavily of propaganda or are aimed at justifying the actions of their heroes: emotions like family pride or group loyalty and local pride are evident. Then the sagnaskemmtun (see glossary), an Icelandic tradition of entertaining groups of people by story-telling which dates back to the early twelfth century, had at least something to do with the writing of many works that can be labelled as historical. Artistic considerations often took precedence over the pursuit of truth. Ari was the only medieval

Icelandic historian dealing with material other than strictly contemporary who was thoroughly critical of his sources. But historians of contemporary events, knowing that they had an informed and critical audience, must have been hesitant to indulge in gross inventions. Finally, the likelihood is that some of those who were in a position to do so - writing materials were expensive - wrote partly for intellectual satisfaction and because of love of learning in general. This has been so throughout the history of Iceland.

Considering Icelandic historiography in the context of medieval historiography in general, most Icelandic historical works were distinguished by being written in the vernacular and by the strength of the secular element; hagiology did not bulk large in Iceland. Some of the Icelandic works were without a parallel in this period. It is striking that annalistic writing did not flourish in Iceland except for a brief period, and large-scale chronicles were never written there; town chronicles were naturally out of the question. As a final point, it is noteworthy that in the Middle Ages the Icelanders wrote history only for some three centuries.

The first historians

The first Icelandic historian we know of was Saemundur Sigfusson hinn frodi (the Learned or the Wise) (1056-1133). This legendary character was a clergyman, educated in France. None of his works have been preserved, but several references to these can be found. In all likelihood Saemundur wrote, among other

things, a brief account in Latin of the Norwegian kings from Halfdan the Black (Harold the Fairhaired's father) to Magnus the Good (1035-47).

The priest Ari Thorgilsson hinn frodi (1067/8-1148) is commonly regarded as the father of Icelandic history. Islendingabok (Libellus Islandicorum) written in the period 1122-33 is his only work now extant, but this was a shorter version of a Liber Islandicorum, which presumably included Ari's treatises, now lost, on genealogy and the Norwegian kings. But it is asserted that Landnamabok incorporates much material first written by Ari.[3]

Islendingabok is a brief account of the history of Iceland from the beginning of the settlement, c.870, to 1120. Ari described the settlement of Iceland and Greenland, but he was most concerned with the history of institutions, that of the Althing and of the lay and ecclesiastical administrative systems in Iceland. He obviously regarded the conversion to Christianity as the most important event in Icelandic history. The long-term importance of the fact that he wrote in his native language was enormous; in this respect he was a pioneer, and it is hardly surprising that some Latin influences are detectable in the syntax and that his style is rather dry.

Ari established the chronology and the principles of source criticism in medieval Icelandic historiography. He consulted the two Icelandic bishops, for whom he wrote, as well as Saemundur frodi and stated his sources - almost exclusively oral - frequently.

His explicit and implicit motto was "Nothing but the truth". In this respect he is somewhat reminiscent of Bede, who may have influenced him. Certainly Ari knew some foreign works in Latin, e.g. some annals, and he knew the life of St. Eadmund, either the Latin or the Old English version. Foreign influences are seen in his writing a preface, referring to sources, dividing the work into chapters, and in his compilation of a list of contents. But Islendingabok, in its brevity and emphasis upon institutions, is to some extent unique, although it was basically a product of the international culture of Christendom. It has been suggested that the closest analogues to it are William of Malmesbury's works.[4]

Landnamabok is an account of the settlement of Iceland, in which about 400 settlers are dealt with; we are told where some of them came from, where they lived, and who their descendants were. Five versions of Landnamabok are now extant, but it has been shown [5] that they are all derived from a version written in the early thirteenth century, and it is generally accepted that the work was initiated about 1130 or earlier and that Ari frodi made an important contribution to it, to say the least. It has been argued[6] that the writing of Landnamabok was inspired by a desire to establish udal law in Iceland, but this is very much open to doubt. Certainly Landnamabok was not written for the purpose of entertainment; it is rather heavy-going, although there are some interesting short episodes concerning certain important persons, which are sometimes based on folk-

lore.

In the two best versions of Landnamabok we can find the names of more than 3500 persons and over 1500 place-names. No European nation has a comparable work dealing with its early history. Its value for topography, personal history, and genealogy can hardly be overestimated, and it was a source which subsequent historians used extensively.

Icelandic historiography evolved in such a way that by 1200 we can divide it roughly into four main branches: church history, secular contemporary history, histories dealing with the outside world, and the sagas of Icelanders. In the late thirteenth century, if not earlier, annalistic writing emerged.

Church history

The biskupasogur (bishops' sagas) proper cover, with intervals, the period from about 1000 to 1340, and they were written in the period c.1200-1340. But the missionary activity in Iceland and the conversion itself is described in Thorvalds thattur vidforla and Kristni saga, a compilation from various sources, probably dating from the early thirteenth century which goes down to the twelfth century. The bishops' sagas can be divided into two categories. First there are lives (more than one version of each) written as propaganda in support of the canonization of individual bishops like Jons saga helga by Gunnlaugur Leifsson (d.1218), and Thorlaks saga biskups, Gudmundar saga Arasonar by Arngrimur Brandsson (d.1361). There are appendices to all these sagas describing miracles associated

with the bishops in question. Thorlaks saga and Jons saga were originally written in Latin, but were very soon translated into Icelandic.

The five in the second category contain predominantly historical works: Hungurvaka, Pals saga biskups, Arna saga biskups, Laurentius saga by Einar Haflidason (1307-93), and Jons þattur biskups Halldorssonar. These are not only our main sources for the history of the church in the period, but also in some cases (especially Arna saga and Laurentius saga) for the general political history of the country. The history of the bishops in the Skalholt diocese (founded in 1056) is dealt with down to 1211 and then resumed in the late thirteenth century, but the bishops of Holar are covered less extensively.

The biskupasogur are as a whole well written. Hungurvaka - the history of the first five bishops of Skalholt in which references are also made to the contemporary Holabiskupar - and Pals saga were in all likelihood written by the same author, who continued the tradition of Ari frodi. In a preface to Hungurvaka (i.e. "Appetizer") he said that he wrote in order to inform young people and to induce them to read books written in their own language. His work is partly based on oral sources. He certainly knew Cantilena by St. Lambert and perhaps Adam of Bremen's Gesta Hammaburgensis. Arna saga and Laurentius saga are also regarded as reliable. They were written by men who knew the two bishops intimately, and the author of Arna saga must have had access to the records of the diocese.

Sturlunga saga

Then we come to a group of contemporary or nearly contemporary sagas, mainly secular, dealing with events in the twelfth century and the thirteenth century down to the end of the Commonwealth. These sagas written by various authors and some other material are found in a work compiled about 1300, which is known as Sturlunga saga (from Sturlungar). The first of the eight sagas in order of time is Thorgils saga og Haflida , which deals with the early twelfth century, but by far the longest one is Islendinga saga by Sturla Thordarson (1214-1284), one of the Sturlungar and Snorri Sturluson's nephew, which covers the period from 1183 to the mid-thirteenth century.

The main theme of Sturlunga saga is the disputes and fights between various chieftains: most of the work indeed deals with the turbulent Age of the Sturlungs. None of the authors saw his subject-matter in perspective; they were all concerned with individuals rather than institutions and the general history of the nation. The normal pattern of life in the country is only dealt with incidentally. The individual sagas, when put together, do not form an orderly whole, they are seldom polished, and the plot of many of them is very incoherent. A number of people are only mentioned once or twice, and the chronology is weak. Consequently the work demands close attention from the reader. But many of its scenes are fascinating, ranging from the comical to the dramatic, and by scrutinizing its contents much can be learnt not only about the political struggle in the country, but also about social conditions.

Some of the individual sagas were written from a definite point of view although this is often implicit rather than explicit; their authors were either among the participants in the events they described or stood in a close connection with these. But it is evident that Sturla Thordarson, for instance, tried to be objective. He used written sources to a certain extent, but otherwise the authors of Sturlunga saga relied on oral tradition (and presumably their own imagination) when dealing with matters about which they did not have first-hand information.

All things considered, Sturlunga saga is a unique work, but slight similarities may be found between it and contemporary foreign chronicles, e.g. that of Matthew Paris.

The Sagas of Icelanders

The forty or so Islendinga sogur (the Sagas of Icelanders, known in English somewhat misleadingly as the family sagas) deal mainly with various Icelanders in the Age of the Vikings (particularly in the period c.930-c.1030) and are for the most part set in Iceland. They were written in the late twelfth and the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

As the family sagas have long been regarded as one of the pinnacles of medieval Teutonic literature much research into their nature and origin has been carried out, and these matters have been hotly debated in the last few decades when most scholars have rejected the traditional ideas on the subject. We do not know who wrote most of the sagas - it is possible that many of them were written in the monasteries - and since it is no

easy task to go behind the facade of the detached and usually realistic presentation, the problems of authorship will probably never be satisfactorily solved. According to the older free-prose theory, those who first wrote the sagas were writing them down largely as they were told; the sagas are seen as a historical heritage, which was handed down orally from generation to generation. The adherents of the book-prose theory maintain that there were actual authors of the sagas, who freely used written and oral sources, prose as well as poetry, for the purpose of creating works of literary excellence. Supporters of this theory are also much more sceptical of the reliability of the sagas as historical sources.

In this connection it should be stressed that the family sagas are not all cast in the same mould. As time passed the emphasis on adherence to the actual facts diminished and emphasis on the entertainment element increased accordingly. The youngest (post-classical) sagas may safely be classified as pure fiction. But most of the others (e.g. Njal's saga and Egil's saga) undoubtedly contain a core of historical truth. It is worth noticing that Sturla Thordarson, who certainly was a critical historian, refers to some of the sagas as historical sources. We may assume that the skaldic poetry in the older sagas, which is often referred to as means of verifying the subject-matter, is at least to some extent genuine - composed in the period which the sagas covered. The genealogical element can also largely be relied on, and topographical descriptions are often accurate. On the other

hand, the contemporaries of the writers of the family sagas definitely did not accept them as good history without reservations. The problem of reliability is thus a very complex one; comparison with foreign sources does not help much in this respect. It is perhaps illuminating to compare the family sagas with novels based on historical themes from later times in which the prominence of the factual element varies enormously. But no matter how reliable they may be, the sagas are at any rate an invaluable source of information about the times when they were actually written and life in Iceland in general during the Commonwealth Age.

As for the subject-matter of the family sagas, the biographical element is outstanding; many characters are brilliantly portrayed. Sometimes the framework is the story of one or more families; sometimes it is regional. The presentation can be labelled as epic-heroic; the writers want to tell something sogulegt, i.e. worth relating. The style is lucid and laconic; an impression is given of detached observation, as opposed to subjective analysis. Traditionally, the ideals of the family sagas were regarded as pagan and Nordic, but recently scholars have emphasized the importance of the Christian element in them. The core of their ethics is the concept of aera (honour), which is the driving force behind the blood-feuds, and the concept of drengskapur (fairness of conduct) is also given prominence. Fatalism is evident in many of the sagas, and in connection with this the ideas of good luck (gaefa) and misfortune (ogaefa).

As will be seen in later chapters, the Sagas of Icelanders and other medieval works were a major influence on Icelandic historians in the modern period, e.g. Jon Espolin.

History of the outside world

Despite its geographical position Iceland was not a particularly isolated country in the Age of the Commonwealth. Intercourse with the outside world was extensive, facilitated by linguistic unity: practically the same language was spoken in Iceland as in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and parts of present-day Scotland. The poems of the Icelandic court poets played a particularly important role in helping the Icelanders to become acquainted with the history of the neighbouring countries, especially that of Norway. Both the Norwegian historian Theodricus (late twelfth century) and the Danish historian Saxo (early thirteenth century) marvelled at the Icelanders' knowledge of history.

As mentioned above, Icelandic historiography began with Saemundur Sigfusson's now lost account of the Norwegian kings, which was also, as far as we know, the first venture in this field. After this a number of works on the Norwegian kings were written - a tradition which culminated in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla. These works can be divided into two groups: those which go far back in time and those which are more or less contemporary history.

The first category comprises the works of Saemundur and Ari and numerous other Icelanders, as well as Norwegian historians

from the days of the monk Theodricus (c.1180) onwards. The lives of the kings Olafur Tryggvason (995-1000) and St. Olafur Haraldsson (1015-30) stand out because of their strong hagiographical flavour. Sagas of Olafur Tryggvason were, for instance, written by the Icelandic monks Oddur Snorrason (late twelfth century) and Gunnlaugur Leifsson, first in Latin, then in Icelandic. The original versions of many of the kings' sagas are now lost, but as most authors used material from their predecessors almost unchanged we can expect that a relatively limited quantity of historical data concerning the Norwegian kings, once it had been written down, was lost without a trace. Two compilations from the early thirteenth century, which to some extent overlap show us what stage the study of the lives of the Norwegian kings had reached by then: Morkinskinna, a literary masterpiece which includes many brilliant Islendinga thaettir or short accounts of the Icelanders at the Norwegian court, covers the period 1035-1177, and Fagurskinna takes us from the mid-ninth century to 1177.

The first of the contemporary histories was Eirikur Oddsson's Hryggjarstykki, now lost as a separate entity but used for instance by Snorri. It dealt with the mid-twelfth century kings. In the late twelfth century Karl Jonsson (d.1213), abbot at Thingeyrar, began to write a saga of the famous king Sverrir Sigurdarson (1184-1202), consulting the king himself while he did so. Although obviously biased towards Sverrir, this is a remarkable work; it is well written, its descriptions are vivid, and the

reproductions of the king's speeches are excellent. His successors are the subject of Boglunga sogur, presumably written by an Icelander.

The last Icelander to write kings' sagas was Sturla Thordarson. After the establishment of the Gamli sattmali he was summoned to Norway, where he was employed by King Magnus (1263-80) to write a life of Magnus's father, King Hakon Hakonarson the Old (1217-63). Sturla used all the available sources, e.g. the royal archives, and the result is a work that is detailed and accurate, if dry. Later Sturla wrote a life of King Magnus in the same vein, but unfortunately only fragments of it have been preserved.

Shortly after Fagurskinna was compiled, Sturla's uncle Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241) was writing his history of the Norwegian kings from the earliest times to 1177, known in modern times as Heimskringla. Snorri was a many-sided man: a chieftain and a politician, eventually assassinated at King Hakon's instigation, and the writer of several works besides Heimskringla, e.g. on Icelandic-Norwegian poetry and Scandinavian mythology, and, probably, of Egil's saga. He is undoubtedly one of the great masters of Icelandic prose.

But mastery of style is only one of the reasons why Heimskringla is an outstanding work. Snorri did not state why he wrote it, but undoubtedly he was aware that a good history of the Norwegian kings was needed, and being a rich as well as a learned man, he was in a position to provide one. Snorri had

no axe to grind and set out to be objective, as we can learn from his remarkable preface where he stated his sources and principles of criticizing them. Apart from other histories, he relied on skaldic poetry (as many as 613 poems or fragments of poems are cited in Heimskringla), oral tradition and old genealogies. Out of these he skilfully constructed a coherent account, so while the earlier kings' sagas are a series of individual biographies Heimskringla can be regarded as a political history of Norway written in biographical form.

It is obvious that in his desire to make his work entertaining Snorri deviated considerably from the approach of Ari, his model. He often did not altogether discard material whose trustworthiness he doubted if he found it interesting, and where the sources were tantalizingly brief he used his own imagination to fill the gaps. Nevertheless Snorri definitely deserves to be called a practical historian. In many cases he chooses carefully between his sources and expresses his distrust of some of these, and he often modifies previous accounts of events he was concerned with, e.g. by playing down the supernatural element in them. This is especially seen in the longest individual saga, that of St. Olaf, in his attempts to connect Scandinavian mythology with the early history of Norway (in Ynglinga saga), and in his turning visions into dreams. He was clever at finding things which can throw light on history; he realized, for instance, the importance of material remains for the study of history, and he had a flair for describing people's customs and culture in previous

ages. Snorri's descriptions of people are often brilliant, and he was good at discerning the characteristics of individual kings. He frequently used the device of stating points of view through speeches - in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Thucydides.

As for the Icelanders' historical works dealing with the Old Norse-speaking world outside Norway, some of these are in similar vein to the family sagas, while others are comparable with the Norwegian kings' sagas.

As Greenland was settled from Iceland it was only natural that the Icelanders should write about this and their geographical discoveries in general, as well as about the establishment of a diocese in Greenland in the twelfth century. The structure of these works is similar to that of the family sagas. So is that of Faereyinga saga (The saga of the Faroe Islanders), which is not a reliable historical source; attention is focused on one particular Faroese family and St. Olaf's dealings with the islanders. The Norwegian kings are among the central characters in Orkneyinga saga, which is a compilation, describing the history of Orkney from the earliest times down to c.1170, largely based on Orcadian oral tradition; communications between Iceland and the islands were frequent in the Commonwealth period.

Although the Icelanders did not, naturally, write as extensively about Danish as about Norwegian history, they dealt with the history of Denmark from the days of her legendary kings to c.1190. Skjoldunga saga, containing the lives of the old

kings of Denmark, is now lost in its original form. It corresponds to the semi-mythical Ynglinga saga in Heimskringla and the fictional element in it is so strong that it has been suggested that it might just as well be labelled as the first of the romantic fornaldarsogur (i.e. "sagas of ancient times") as a kings' saga. Knytlinga saga, which takes over where Skjoldunga saga comes to an end, is on the other hand regarded as a basic source for Danish history. It is a compilation of sagas of individual kings, rather similar to the pre-Snorri ones dealing with Norway. Heimskringla is one of its main sources, which shows how intertwined the history of the Scandinavian countries was in those days. In fact, although no saga devoted mainly to Sweden was written in Iceland, Icelandic works, Heimskringla and others, are informative about Swedish history. The same goes for other parts of the Viking world such as England.

Annals

It goes without saying that learned men in Iceland were well acquainted with the annalistic tradition of Christendom, but annals did not become an important element in Icelandic historiography until relatively late. Some scholars have traced the beginning of annalistic writing in Iceland back to the twelfth century, but this is disputable. The oldest Icelandic annal now extant dates from the late thirteenth century.

The medieval Icelandic annals are closely inter-related; as every annalist borrowed from his predecessors, in some cases the independent, original material in individual annals is very

limited. Most of the annals begin at the birth of Christ or a little earlier or later. The chronology was usually based on Bede and for a period the Icelanders used the chronology of the German Gerlandus,[7] but some used a distinct Icelandic chronology. The Icelandic parts of the annals are written almost exclusively in the native language. In general, they are very sketchy and do not cover particular items in detail; thus they cannot by any means be called chronicles. Even the contemporary sections in the annals were sometimes written by more than one person, and this fact together with the sketchiness, means that in some cases very little can be learnt about the attitudes of individual annalists. But their choice of noteworthy events is often obviously affected by geographical factors; they knew most about what happened in the regions where they lived themselves. And the affiliations of some of them with the church are very evident. In the sections written contemporaneously foreign affairs are not neglected, and it emerges that the Icelanders were very knowledgeable about these matters.

The medieval annals are very valuable sources for the period from the end of the Commonwealth to 1430, when annalistic writing came to an end for the time being. Few other historical works were written in Iceland during this period, and other sources are so scanty that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have been called the "Dark Age" in Icelandic history. It seems likely that the Black Death in the early fifteenth century which swept away approximately one third of the country's population,

including many learned men, was one of the causes of the discontinuation of historical writing. For the century that followed our main sources are documents of various kind, which are rather limited in their use, as well as non-contemporary history. Since Iceland is poor in material remains from the Middle Ages, archaeology can do little to supplement written sources.

(2) After the Reformation

Humanists and historians of the Reformation

The first historical work we know of after the Reformation is Gottskalksannall, written by the north Icelandic clergyman Gottskalk Jonsson (1524-1590) and his son. It is independent from 1395 to its end in 1578 and although very brief (the authors left out important events which they must have known perfectly well) it is a valuable source for an obscure period.

Gottskalksannall must be regarded as an isolated peneomenon. It seems as if the Icelanders' interest in the past was diminishing in the sixteenth century; certainly few manuscripts have survived from this period than from earlier periods, which can hardly be a coincidence. The revival of Icelandic historiography did not begin until the close of the century. Its main champions were men who had studied abroad, and it seems safe to regard direct and indirect foreign, mainly humanistic, influences as an essential factor in this, determining which channels Icelandic historiography moved into.[8]

The foremost humanist Icelander was Arngrimur Jonsson, commonly called Arngrimur laerdi, i.e. "the Learned", (1568-1648), a parson and a schoolmaster. When staying in Copenhagen in 1593 he published his first work, Brevis commentarius de Islandia (reprinted in the Hakluyt collection in 1599), in order to refute inaccurate and derogatory accounts of Iceland in foreign books. This was the first work written by an Icelander for an international public; for the first time the art of printing affected Icelandic historiography. Brevis commentarius served to bring Arngrimur in contact with the leading Danish humanists of the period e.g. Chancellor Arild Huitfeldt, the historian, and two future historiographers royal, Anders Sorensen Vedel and Niels Krag. At this stage the Icelandic sources for the history of Scandinavia were practically unknown to the outside world, and the curiosity of the Danish scholars was aroused by Arngrimur. He was encouraged by them and given financial support to collect source material of this kind in Iceland, and out of this activity grew his works on Scandinavian and Icelandic history, all of which he wrote in Latin and which attracted much attention and were widely used, especially those dealing with Iceland; those dealing with Scandinavia were not printed in his own day. Arngrimur's most famous work is Crymogaea (Hamburg, 1609), which deals with Icelandic affairs in general, and contains a large section devoted to the country's history. He wrote fairly extensive histories of Denmark and Norway, and smaller ones of Sweden and the Orkneys. All these works are

based exclusively on medieval Icelandic sources, some of which Arngrimur translated into Latin. He was also concerned with history in his polemic works where he corrects much of what had previously been written about the history of Iceland and Scandinavia.

Arngrimur's theory of history and working methods were deeply influenced by humanistic ideas, some of which he adopted directly from his Danish contemporaries and Jean Bodin. Arngrimur had a cyclical and didactic view of history, had a preference for political themes, and was very eager to trace the history of the nations he dealt with as far back as possible. He was nationalistic but at the same time an ardent monarchist. Although not a great stylist and certainly not an outstanding rhetorician he, like hisforeign contemporaries, was keen to reproduce direct as well as indirect speeches. He was markedly lacking in source criticism. Adam of Bremen and Saxo - both foreigners, it may be noted - were the only medieval authorities he did not trust; his faith in the written word was almost absolute.[9]

Arngrimur Jonsson occupies an important place in Icelandic and Scandinavian intellectual history and historiography. He can be called the father of Icelandic and Scandinavian (Nordic) medieval studies, a discipline that has flourished ever since. Owing to Arngrimur's work, the attention of the outside world, especially the Scandinavian nations, was directed to Iceland - to Icelandic manuscripts and Icelandic scholars. This naturally had its effects in Iceland as will be shown later. The direct

influence of Arngrimur and other humanists must have been very considerable as well. As a result, there was a change in the intellectual climate in Iceland. Nostalgic attitudes towards the past reasserted themselves; antiquarian studies were pursued vigourously, and the copying of ancient texts became common again (this may perhaps partly be ascribed to the fact that relatively cheap paper was now available). The "learned age" in Icelandic literary history, when Latin scholarship, for instance, reached its peak, had begun.

Oddur Einarsson, bishop of Skalholt, (1559-1634) studied, like Arngrimur, in Copenhagen in the late sixteenth century and was presumably influenced by the same intellectual currents. Moreover, both of them had close connections with Bishop Gudbrandur Thorlaksson. It was only natural that the first Lutheran bishops in Iceland interested themselves in the history of the Reformation, and Oddur's contribution in this field was indeed remarkable. He himself wrote an essay on the bishops of Skalholt before and at the time of the Reformation. This was the main source for Jon Gissurarson's (d.1648) essay on a similar theme, written in the 1640s, which deals in some detail with individual events but which is not very analytical; there is, however, a good introduction on the Catholic religion and Catholic customs. It is likely that Oddur sponsored the writing of an account of Jon Arason, the last Catholic bishop of Hólar, and of the Biskupaannalar by ~~Rev~~ Parson. Jon Egilsson (1548-1630s).

The latter is an orderly account of the Catholic (primarily

the last) bishops and first Lutheran ones of Skalholt. The description of the Reformation is based exclusively on oral sources, many of which are cited, and on the memory of the author himself. It is obvious that Jon Egilsson was an honest man; he was cautious in his approach and tried to be objective. Superstitious beliefs are apparent in the essay, but this was a common feature of most Icelandic historical works in the seventeenth century. Jon's style is very colloquial and unassuming, but elegant; it says something about the state of the Icelandic language in this period that this work is better written than the more learned contemporary compositions.

Thanks to these works and various primary sources we know more about the Age of Reformation than any preceding period and some later ones.

Annals

Thorlakur Skulason (1597-1656), the successor to Bishop Guobrandur of Holar, was also educated in Copenhagen where he became acquainted with Ole Worm, the famous antiquarian, who had been influenced by Arngrimur Jonsson. Bishop Thorlakur was concerned about the state of Icelandic historiography, and he encouraged the learned farmer Bjorn Jonsson at Skardsa in Northern Iceland (1574-1655) to write an annal that covered the period since the discontinuation of the medieval annalistic writing, and gave him generous support.

Skardsarannall (1400-1640) is based on Gottskalksannall, oral sources, letters, records, and the foreign material on Danish historical works. It marks the beginning of the second

period of the prominence of annals in Icelandic historiography, which can be said to have lasted until the late eighteenth century, although the greatest exponent of this tradition, Jon Espolin, the central figure of this thesis, wrote his annals after that. These modern annals constitute a direct continuation of the medieval annalistic tradition. It is remarkable that when the writing of annals was declining in most countries, including the Scandinavian ones, it was booming in Iceland. Here Bjorn Jonsson was the great model; Skardsarannall (not printed until 1774-5) was used extensively by subsequent annalists and often simply copied out and fitted into annalistic compilations.

The post-Reformation annalists were either parsons or well-to-do farmers, some of whom, for instance Bjorn Jonsson, were logrettumenn. Most of the annalists did not write anything original about times they had not lived through themselves; they were essentially contemporary historians. Once they had started writing they normally wrote year by year. In their annals the emphasis is on the weather and natural disasters and their effect on the country's fortunes, on crimes, accidents and shipwrecks, the deaths of prominent people, the consecration of clergymen, and appointments to important offices. Superstitious ideas - such as belief in witchcraft, supernatural beings, and foreboding spectacles - are often evident, especially in the earlier annals. In the eighteenth century annals these beliefs figure less prominently, and they were regarded with antipathy by Jon Espolin, as will be apparent later. Events in the regions where the annalists lived -

mostly in the North and the West - are significantly better covered than events in the distant parts of the country. The annalists included much foreign material; news from abroad was brought by the ships which sailed to the country every year. There are many errors in the foreign sections, but it is remarkable how much factual information from abroad the annalists managed to gather. The emphasis here is on war and political events, and Scandinavian affairs in particular.

Bjorn Jonsson wrote other historical works besides Skardsarannall, e.g. an account of the plundering raids by Algerian pirates in Iceland in 1627. Two other authors wrote about the same subject, and one wrote about the massacre of Spanish fishermen in the Northwest in 1615. But apart from this separate accounts of individual contemporary events were rarely attempted, and very little was written separately on the history of other countries.

Historians of the Middle Ages and manuscript experts

Bishop Thorlakur Skulason's contribution to Icelandic studies was not limited to supporting Bjorn Jonsson. The sudden increase in manuscript copying about 1640 can be traced to him as well as to Brynjolfur Sveinsson, bishop of Skalholt (1605-1674), and Brynjolfur's half-brother, Jon Gissurarson. The effect of Arngrimur Jonsson's work in Scandinavia has already been mentioned; the current European antiquarianism further stimulated the Danes and the Swedes to collect Icelandic manuscripts and investigate their contents. This could not be done without

knowledge of Old Norse or Icelandic. Therefore help from Icelandic scholars, who could read the old language without difficulty, was indispensable. Consequently it became possible for Icelanders to make a living abroad as antiquarians and medieval scholars - a trend which has continued to the present day. These men wrote commentaries on the Old Icelandic and Scandinavian works, translated some of them and edited them when they were printed; they wrote about philology and mythology and sometimes they wrote actual histories.

Among those who worked for the Swedish College of Antiquities (Antikvitetskollegium), founded in 1667, Jon Rugmann (1636-1679) who wrote for instance a treatise on medieval law and a summary of Heimskringla, and Jon Eggertsson (c.1643-1689) deserve mention. At the close of the century the collection of Icelandic manuscripts for the Swedes, an activity which the Danes resented, came to an end, and the Swedes ceased to employ Icelandic scholars although they themselves continued to work in this field.

King Frederick III of Denmark (1648-70) was an enthusiastic manuscript collector. In 1655 he appointed Thorarinn Eiriksson (d.1659) interpres regius of Icelandic and Nordic antiquities. Thorarinn's only written contribution to the subject was a translation into Latin of a saga of King Halfdan the Black of Norway. But his successor to the post, Thormodur Torfason (Torfaeus) (1636-1719) became very famous as a historian, mainly because of his work in the field of Scandinavian history. Torfaeus had a

chequered career, but most of the time he was in a position to concentrate on his studies, sometimes helped by various Icelanders. In 1664 he moved to Norway and was appointed antiquarius regius in 1667 and historiographer of Norway in 1682. He translated many Old Icelandic works into Latin for his royal patrons, and wrote in Latin historical works, based on the old manuscripts, which were printed in the period 1695-1711: De rebus gestis Faeroensium, Orcades, Series dynastarum et regum Daniae, Historia Vinlandia antiqua, Groenlandia antiqua, Trifolium historicum (on Gorm the Old and his successors), and his opus magnum, Historia rerum Norvegicarum. Now, for the first time, purely historical works, based on the Old Icelandic sources were available to the international reading public. Torfaeus's history of Norway was for a long time regarded as an authoritative work on the subject. Some of his books were translated into Danish, German, and even English (in the nineteenth century). Torfaeus was an energetic and conscientious man, but his source criticism was only rudimentary. However, it seems as if only one contemporary scholar was acutely aware of this.

This was Torfaeus's friend, Arni Magnusson (1663-1730), the greatest manuscript collector and manuscript expert of them all. He began to collect manuscripts in his early twenties, and this developed into a lifelong passion. In 1701 he was appointed professor of philosophy and antiquities in Copenhagen and professor of geography and history in 1721, but he did not devote much time to these posts: he undertook, for instance, important

administrative duties in Iceland in the century's first decade. Arni did not write very much himself, but everything he did bears witness to his critical faculties. A large part of his unique manuscript collection perished in the great fire which raged in Copenhagen in 1728, but what remained, now known as the Arnamagnaean Collection, he bequeathed to the University of Copenhagen. He also established a fund for the purpose of keeping the collection in good order and supporting Icelandic students working in his field. The Arnamagnaean Foundation was for a long time the centre of Icelandic studies and plays a very important role in Icelandic historiography.

Jon Olafsson fra Grunnavik (1705-1779) was one of the beneficiaries of the Foundation. He was an eccentric, rather uncritical and superstitious, but his enormous knowledge is reflected in his voluminous works, which were either not published until after his death or are still unpublished.

Jon Olafsson Svefneyingur or Hypnonesius (1731-1811) worked mainly in Copenhagen, for a while for the Arnamagnaean Foundation. He wrote extensively, about philology and literature, e.g. the first treatise on Old Icelandic poetry, and also about history. He edited various works such as Landnamabok and Hungurvaka, and contributed to the so-called Schoning edition of Heimskringla. Another prominent Icelandic scholar, Skuli Thorlacius (1741-1815), also worked on this edition.

Grimur Thorkelin (1752-1829), keeper of the privy archives in Copenhagen, edited works on medieval law as well as Beowulf,

the manuscript of which he discovered in the British Museum, and wrote a number of essays on various subjects.

Other eighteenth century historians

Lastly we come to three essentially non-annalistic writers who lived for the most part in Iceland, although all of them studied at Copenhagen University, and who were active in fields other than medieval studies. Unlike the group of scholars we have just dealt with, Jon Halldorsson and Finnur Jonsson did not earn their living primarily by writing and engaging in scholarly pursuits; they were by profession ecclesiastics. Many of the works of the three were not written with an eye to publication and were not printed in the authors' lifetime (some have, in fact, never been printed). In their works the Icelanders' traditional fondness of biography is reflected.

Jon Halldorsson (1665-1736), co-rector at Skalholt and subsequently parson at Hitardalur, wrote on various subjects, but his main contribution was in the sphere of personal history and genealogy, where he carried out enormous researches from which his successors, including his descendants, benefited greatly. It is noteworthy that Jon did not begin to write on a large scale until he had reached the age of fifty (most of his works were written in the period 1715-34).

He first wrote the lives of the royal stewards in Iceland, and then turned to the lives of the Icelandic bishops from the beginning down to his own day. The section dealing with the Catholic bishops is not very valuable as a source, but his account

of the Lutheran ones is useful. The portraits of individual bishops are often vivid and succinct. Jon also wrote the lives of the headmasters of the cathedral school at Skalholt and the lives of the clergymen in the Skalholt diocese from the Reformation to c.1730, which are on the same lines as the bishops' lives. Moreover, he wrote an annal for ten years and contributed to another one. None of Jon's works were printed until the late nineteenth century, but they were extremely popular before their publication: there were many manuscript copies of them in circulation.

By the standards of the age, Jon Halldorsson was a good writer, but Danish influences on Icelandic were very strong in this period and are apparent in Jon's writing. He wrote prefaces to his lives of the bishops which shed light on his attitude towards his discipline and his comments on other historians are often revealing. He was as a whole critical and not at all credulous: he often corrected the annalists' statements and discarded items that he thought untrustworthy. He realized how difficult it is to construct a coherent and reliable account where the sources are scarce.

Jon Halldorsson's son, Finnur Jonsson (1704-1789), was also a noted historian. Encouraged by the Danish pietist Ludvig Harboe, he and his brother, Vigfus Jonsson (1706-1776) - no mean scholar in his own right - began to collect sources for Icelandic church history, and the Danish authorities employed Finnur to write such a history. Finnur was not in a position to concentrate on this -

he was appointed bishop in 1753 - but with the help of Jon Eiriksson (see Chapter 1) and Finnur's son, Hannes Finnsson, the work - based on the labours of three generations - gradually progressed and was printed in Copenhagen between 1772 and 1778. Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae is a huge work of over 2500 pages (arranged in four volumes). It contains much material which is not immediately related to the Church, andfor a long time no better general history of Iceland was available. The Historia is not a particularly sophisticated work, but the making of such a large-scale synthesis of the main sources for Icelandic history, most of which were not available in print, was certainly a major achievement.

Finnur Jonsson also wrote a life of Snorri Sturluson (as an introduction to the edition of Heimskringla mentioned above, printed in 1777), some lives of learned Icelanders, and various yet unprinted essays on medieval topics.

Halfdan Einarsson (1732-1785), a schoolmaster at Holar, edited Speculum regale for the Osynilega felag, but his main work was Sciagraphia Historiae Literariae Islandicae (Copenhagen, 1777), which established him as an international authority. This is a series of biographical sketches of the most prominent Icelandic writers in various fields, altogether about 400 of them. They are dealt with in six separate sections: philology, belles-lettres, history, philosophy and science, law, and theology. Halfdan also wrote lives of clergymen in the Holar diocese, which have not as yet been published.

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1 See Bjorn Thorsteinsson, p.225f

2 Bjorn Thorsteinsson, "Historieskrivning. Island," Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder, VI, Copenhagen 1965, pp.597-602.

3 Jakob Benediktsson, "Landnamabok", Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder, X, Copenhagen 1965, p.214ff.

4 Bjorn Sigfusson, Um Islendingabok, Reykjavik 1944, Chapter 6.

5 Jon Johannesson, Gerdir Landnamabokar, Reykjavik 1941.

6 Bardi Gudmundsson, "Uppruni Landnamabokar," Skirnir CXII (1938), pp.5-22.

7 See Jon Johannesson, "Timatal Gerlands i islenzkum ritum fra thjodveldisold", Skirnir CXXVI (1952), pp.76-94.

8 For conflicting views on this issue see Pall Eggert Olason, Menn og menntir sidskiptaldar a Islandi, IV, Reykjavik 1926 and a review of the book by Professor Jon Helgason, Eimreidin XXXII (1926), pp.375-87. Pall Eggert stresses the importance of the native heritage.

9 This paragraph is based almost exclusively on Jakob Benediktsson's researches as described in Chapter 2 of his introduction to Arngrimi Jonae Opera Latina conscripta, IV, Copenhagen 1957.

CHAPTER 3

JON ESPOLIN - A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

(1) The sources

The most important of these is Espolin's biography, Saga Jons Espolins (Sg.J.E.) by his friend Gisli Konradsson (1787-1877), the farmer and historian (see Chapter 11). Espolin wrote an incomplete account of his life in Danish. Gisli Konradsson translated this into Icelandic, added some new material and wrote the concluding chapters independently. Espolin's manuscript of this work apparently is now no longer extant, but Gisli's additions could probably be established by comparing the draft for his translation (in the MS.JS.127,4to) with the final version of the biography, which was printed in Copenhagen in 1895. This is a relatively brief work, some 50,000-60,000 words, and it deals mainly with Espolin's official career; it says disappointingly little on his historical studies and writing, and his intellectual pursuits as a whole.

Espolin refers to himself many times in his Arbaekur Islands i sogu-formi (Arb.Isl.), especially to his work as a syslumadur. And some useful information can be found in a very brief annal (IB.446,4to), which Espolin presumably wrote year by year; in this, world events, Icelandic events in general, and events concerning Espolin himself are dealt with in separate columns. Espolin's notebook 1797-1836 (Lbs.696,8vo.), contains a great deal of material concerning his career as an official, and various letters from him; those which he wrote to the Danish philologist Rasmus Chr. Rask

(see Chapter 1) and others, add considerably to our knowledge of his personality. Then, of course, much can be learnt about the man himself from his voluminous literary products, especially the prefaces to some of the individual works.

Official documents, such as the court records, of the individual syslur where Espolin served, could no doubt provide additional valuable information about his life. There is a list of the manuscripts in Espolin's possession (IB.329,4to.), compiled when his estate was eventually divided up between his heirs, but a similar list of the books in his library apparently does not exist. It seems certain that there must also be many references to Espolin in letters by his contemporaries, but it would be difficult to trace these exhaustively.

Naturally, Espolin is dealt with in various historical and biographical works, but apart from Gisli Konradsson only two men have written about him at any length. The librarian Jon Arnason (1819-1888) wrote a short biography (in the MS.JS.164,fol.), and as an introduction to the lithographed edition of Arb.Isl. (Reykjavik 1943) Arni Palsson, professor of history, wrote a stimulating essay: Um Espolin og Arbaekurnar (On Espolin and his Annals).

(2) A general outline of Espolin's life

Jon Jonsson Espolin[1] was born on the farm Espiholl in Eyjafjardarsysla, Northern Iceland, on October 22nd, 1769. His parents were Jon Jakobsson (1738-1808), the sheriff of Eyjafjardarsysla, and his wife, Sigridur Stefansdottir (1734-1818). Jon

Jakobsson was a successful and respected official as well as a very intelligent and able man. The public apparently regarded him as tender-hearted but young Jon knew him as a strict disciplinarian, even by contemporary standards, as well as a caring father. Sigridur was of the most influential family in Iceland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; she was the sister of stiftamtmadur Olafur Stefansson. Her first husband was another sheriff of Eyjafjardarsysla, Thorarinn Jonsson; several of their descendants attained fame, e.g. Bjarni Thorarensen, amtmadur and poet (see Chapter 1). She bore Jon Jakobsson four children. Her contemporaries regarded Sigridur as a remarkable person, but she was said to be very parsimonious.

Espolin[2], it seems, was very young when it was decided that he should receive higher education, but we must not conclude either from this, or from the fact that his parents were well off, that he was ignorant of the condition of the masses. Espolin was at first taught by his father, who used to scold him excessively, and later he studied under the supervision of several parsons. This was not an uncommon practice in the period anywhere in Europe, but the particular reason why Jon Jakobsson chose to have his son educated in this way was that he feared that young Jon would be demoralized if he went to a boarding school. Espolin got on well with all his teachers except his half-brother Gisli Thorarinsson, but he was especially impressed by the orthodox Jon Jonsson at Modrufell in Eyjafjardarsysla (see Chapter 1), who later played an important role in the affairs of the Icelandic

church. We may presume that Espolin's studies followed the curriculum of the Latin schools where the emphasis was on the classics (see Chapter 1). After four years at Modrufell Espolin graduated, in 1788, as a student and was qualified for entry into university. It was then decided that he should sail to Copenhagen to study law.

Espolin says that despite his love of his parents he was pleased to get away from home. Two of his half-brothers were staying in Copenhagen during the same period. He also became acquainted with other Icelanders in the Danish capital, and made some friends among the Danes, whom he liked on the whole, so he definitely did not lack companionship. But one gets the impression from the biography that he was not particularly aware of the intellectual currents of the age; he does not mention joining any clubs or societies. Besides law we know that Espolin studied philosophy, history and the New Testament in Greek, and he did well in his preliminary examinations. However, during his second year he spent much time in the company of revellers and got into debt. In the spring of 1790 he was compelled to return home because of shortage of money. His parents received him reasonably well, but his father would not allow him to go back to Copenhagen and acute tension developed between him and his son. The following summer, however, Jon Jakobsson finally agreed to support Espolin for a further year in Copenhagen on condition that he then graduated. This time Espolin's stay in Copenhagen was a happy one; he worked fairly hard, went occasionally to the theatre

and played billiards. In June and July 1792 he sat his examinations and graduated. He now aspired to get an appointment as a deputy district judge in Zealand. But he learned, to his surprise, that the position of sheriff in Snaefellsnessysla was vacant, and a friend persuaded him to apply for it. He was appointed to the post and sailed to Iceland in the autumn, feeling apprehensive about the responsibilities he had undertaken.

The basic information about the office of syslumadur and his position in the administrative system can be found in glossary. But it should be added here that the syslumadur had to travel a great deal throughout the year (mostly on horseback) and had to do considerable paperwork, so he had a strenuous life if he chose to carry the burden of the position alone (some sheriffs had permanent assistants). Moreover, owing to the material conditions of the masses, thefts were fairly frequent and major crimes, even murder, were not altogether rare. The abilities and energies of those who became syslumenn were sorely tested.

Jon Espolin was not well suited for this. He was very young, inexperienced, his knowledge of law shaky, and his judgement was not very sound, as will appear later. He made several mistakes in the discharge of his duties and made many enemies. His income was not fixed and he was better at other things than making money. He also had difficulty in finding a decent place to live. In addition, his parents and relatives tried to stop him marrying a girl of peasant origin, named Rannveig Jonsdottir

(1773-1846), whom he had fallen in love with. Eventually they relented, however, and in 1797, the year in which Espolin exchanged positions with the sheriff of Borgarfjardarsysla, he and Rannveig were married. She was to have enormous influence on his career. Their domestic life was always very happy, and it seems reasonable to argue that it was largely thanks to her support that Espolin managed to concentrate on the writing of history with the results we know. Rannveig understood money matters much better than he did and largely managed the household, and in the course of time they became reasonably well off. They had one son, Hakon, who became a parson in eastern Iceland.

Espolin did better in Borgarfjardarsysla, where he lived on the farm Thingnes, than he had done in Snaefellsnessysla. There he did not have many companions, but in Borgarfjardarsysla he had relatives and friends. Nevertheless he wanted to move to northern Iceland, and in 1803 he exchanged positions with the sheriff of Skagafjardarsysla. During his first years there he lived at Flugumyri, then from 1806 to 1822 at Vidvik, and for the rest of his life at Frostastadir. Although his knowledge of law had improved through his acquaintance with Magnus Stephensen, he was still not a skilled lawyer and, energetic as he was, never having a full-time assistant, he tended to dispose of official business rather too cursorily at times. He was strict in his enforcement of penal laws,[3] and the sentences he passed were often modified by the landsyfirrettur. Moreover, Espolin was

on bad terms with his superior, the amtmadur, although the man was his half-brother, Stefan Thorarinsson. He often censured Espolin for various decisions he made as a sheriff.

It is known that after several years in Skagafjardarsysla Espolin wished to be relieved of his duties so as to be able to concentrate on his research and writing. He was now suffering from rheumatism and thought that he had had his share of travelling and other unpleasant aspects of the sheriff's work. After the publication of the first part of Arb.Isl. in 1821 his fame spread, and his friends and admirers in Iceland and Denmark as well as the new amtmadur in the North, Grimur Jonsson, supported his case. In 1825 Espolin, now 55 years old, was pensioned off. He was to get 55 rigsdaler per annum, which was something like the average sheriff's pension, but in 1828 100 rigsdaler per annum were added to this, probably on the initiative of Espolin's friends in Copenhagen. He could now spend most of his time writing, free from material worries, but in the summer of 1834 he had a set-back, apparently a partial paralytic stroke, from which he never recovered, and on August 1st, 1836, he died.

(3) Espolin's career as an historian

It was important for Espolin's development as a historian that he became interested in historical matters as a young boy. The main influences on him in this respect were his father, who had a good collection of printed books and manuscripts and who wrote various historical and other works (see Chapter 11), and

the sagnaskemmtun (see Chapter 1) the Icelandic tradition of entertaining people working on winter evenings by reading aloud various tales and sagas, or intoning the rimur. Espolin says that when he was very young he was eager to listen to old wives' tales, but his tastes soon changed. He and his brother Jakob (who died in his twenties in Copenhagen) based their games on historical themes, creating a fantasy world of their own. Espolin was particularly interested in everything which had to do with physical strength (as indeed was common among the Icelanders), anything of a heroic and military nature, but he had wide interests and a good understanding although he says that he was not very quick to digest fully what he had learnt.

Before he was thirteen Espolin had read the Bible, the contents of which he remembered well, as well as history books. He began with a book by the Dane Hubner, probably Korte Spørgsmaal af den politiske Historie (Brief Questions concerning Political History), published 1746-50, from which he says he learned Danish and chronological data; "he read this work intensely, and people could hardly understand the satisfaction this gave him". Then he went on to read a world history by Abraham Kall, (1743-1821), professor of history in Copenhagen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[4] Espolin's memory was indeed extremely good; so good that he took it for granted that he remembered everything accurately, and consequently he occasionally made mistakes. We can safely presume that before he went abroad he had acquired fairly extensive knowledge both of Icelandic history and

world history. He wrote his first surviving historical work in his leisure hours in 1787 and presented his father with it in the new year. This big work, Heimskringla eda saga alls Romverjarikis (H. or A History of the whole of the Roman Empire), is of course not original, but it shows that already at the age of eighteen Espolin was a prolific writer who had developed a highly individual style.

In Copenhagen Espolin attended some lectures on history, and when he was examined in the subject in April 1789 his performance was outstanding. It is possible that the lectures Espolin refers to were given by Frederik Schneedorff (1760-1792), who, having studied in Gottingen and been influenced by the historians there, went on to lecture in Copenhagen on the history of the post-medieval period and gained an extraordinary reputation. At any rate it is certain that Espolin's stay in Copenhagen was important in his development as an historian. He used every opportunity to increase his general knowledge of history, and it is tempting to think that he came home with many of the books on which he based his own historical works.

When in Snaefellsnessysla Espolin was not in a position to ride his hobby-horse, but conditions were more favourable in the calmer atmosphere of Borgarfjardarsysla. His first historical work after he became a sheriff was, as far as we know, Keisara og Romverja sogur (A History of the Emperors and the Romans), written in his leisure hours in the winter 1799-1800 - the first part of a European history, Sogur fornra Norduralfubua (Sgr.fo.No.).

Although relations between Espolin and Magnus Stephensen were somewhat strained at times, it seems likely that Magnus encouraged his cousin to continue his writing activities. Magnus's Landsuppfraedingarfelag indeed had dealings with Espolin. It printed some poetry by Espolin (he was, incidentally, rather proud of his poetical abilities, which to us seem mediocre), e.g. hymns translated from Danish in the controversial hymn-book of 1801; the society honoured him by presenting him with a copy of the book. He then translated a brief history text-book, Kennslu-Bok i Sagna-Fraedinni by Galletti; this translation was published,with a brief supplementary essay on Icelandic history by Espolin, in 1804. However, Magnus was apparently not interested in publishing Espolin's European history, which he must have known about.

We do not know whether Espolin had begun compiling Arb.Isl. before he moved north, but by 1808 he had finished the first part and he probably concentrated on this project for the next few years. Although there was no longer a bishop's see and a Latin school at Holar, there were several people in Skagafjardarsysla who shared Espolin's intellectual interests. Together with Ari Arason (1763-1840), a physician living at Flugumyri he founded a reading society shortly after he went north - meetings of this society at Flugumyri in 1805 and Vidvik in 1806 are mentioned in the biography[5] - apparently in liaison with a similar society in Denmark. The latter was discontinued because of the war and the Icelandic society declined when Espolin and Ari were no longer

neighbours and soon disintegrated; its stock of books was divided among the members.[6] But we can presume that by then Espolin had read most of, or even all, the books and learned many things from them.

And the sad fate of the reading society did not mean that Espolin lost contact with his friends. These included Gisli Konradsson and Petur Petursson, the archdeacon (profastur) of Miklibaer. Later Espolin became acquainted with Bishop Steingrimur Jonsson, a prominent genealogist, from whom he borrowed genealogies, and the son of a half-brother of his, Bjarni Thorarensen, whom he much admired. According to the biography Espolin especially welcomed visitors who were interested in history and genealogy, and no doubt conversations about these subjects stimulated him to further efforts in the field of historical writing.

This may apply especially to one particular visitor: the Danish philologist Rasmus Chr. Rask, who called to see Espolin when he came to the country in 1814. They discussed antiquities and other matters, and Espolin showed Rask his books, some of which may have been manuscripts. It is clear that at this stage Espolin had a considerable collection of source materials at his disposal. Rask encouraged Espolin to try to have Arb.Isl. published.[7] There is no doubt that being praised by such an outstanding scholar was important to Espolin. He corresponded with Rask later on[8] and asked him several questions concerning his travels in Asia which show how alert Espolin's mind was and how

determined his pursuit of knowledge. He asked, for instance, did Rask find distinct resemblance between the Icelanders and any of the nations he came to know? Had he come across anything which could throw light on the relationship between the Icelanders and the Scandinavian nations? Had he found any indications of the position of Gothic in the Teutonic language group? But above all the letters show that Espolin had a great respect for Rask. Indeed he had every reason to be grateful to the Dane: so much had Rask and the Bokmenntafelag done for him since 1820 when they had offered to publish the Annals. In addition to the services, mentioned above (section 2), which the leaders of the Literary Society rendered Espolin, they bestowed honours upon him: in 1826 the society presented him with a collection of books, and in 1826 the Copenhagen branch elected him as an honorary member.

We do not know very much about Jon Espolin's working methods when he wrote history. We only know that when he served as syslumadur he spent most of his leisure hours writing. In winter and even in summer official business could occasionally be laid aside for a while, and then Espolin worked very hard on history. It is said that he even wrote on horseback.[9] In the summer of 1810, we read, he got his exercise, while he stayed at home, from growing a vegetable garden and building a stone wall around it in the mornings, but then he proceeded to write for the rest of the day.[10] Espolin was a very fast writer. A few months before he died he employed an experienced amanuensis who estimated that Espolin wrote faster than he did by a third.[11]

And he seldom bothered to make preliminary drafts. These facts help to explain his gigantic output.

Nor do we know when Espolin wrote many of his individual works. But, in addition to what has already been touched on, Sg.J.E. says that in 1820 he was working on a history of the Trojans;[12] by 1825 he had finished translating the lives of Attila and Theseus;[13] in 1829 he was working as hard as ever if not harder;[14] about 1831 he finished his Heroes' Tales, based on Plutarch and others.[15] In 1833 he was still brimming over with enthusiasm. When Bjarni Thorarensen presented him with Walter Scott's history of Napoleon (almost certainly in a Danish translation) Espolin told Gisli Konradsson that he would have translated it if he had been younger and not engaged in writing other things. But he encouraged Gisli, another prolific writer, to make a translation of the work, which Gisli did.[16] Even after 1834, when he was physically handicapped, Espolin did not give up. He translated Langebek's history of the Vikings, wrote a history of Sweden and a life of Caesar, and completed the second version of his ecclesiastical history. His last undertaking was the translation of the Revelation of St. John the Divine, first into Danish, then into Icelandic; Gisli Konradsson remarks that retrogression is evident in this work.[17]

(4) Espolin's personality

At the end of Sg.J.E.[18] Gisli Konradsson describes Espolin very clearly and succinctly - a good example of the Icelandic tradition of describing people which goes back to the Sagas.

Espolin was an athletic-looking man, whose physical strength was legendary, with an impressive countenance. He was "jovial, liked nice surroundings, and everybody found him pleasant to talk to".[19] Indeed, he liked to relax in the company of his friends, chatting and perhaps taking a glass or playing chess with them.[20] That Espolin was a man of great ability is self-evident, but there was a distinct streak of naivety in this physical and intellectual giant. This trait in his personality had a bearing on his deep attachment to his wife and his dependence on her. Espolin was very credulous, rash, and pliable; although he became more sophisticated as he gained experience as a sheriff he was always lacking in shrewdness. In view of this side of his character it is not surprising to find that of all things he took most pride in his strength. Several of his feats are mentioned in the biography, and strong men and bodily exercises were among his favourite subjects of conversation.

Espolin was an honest man; in the biography he does not refrain from describing episodes which in the eyes of many people were not to his own credit. His frankness would sometimes do him harm; when intoxicated (he was fond of drink in his youth but gradually changed his ways) his extreme outspokenness could get him into difficulties. Espolin was always sensitive and could easily be irritated; he found it difficult to restrain himself when arguing about subjects which he had strong views on. One of these was religion. Espolin admired the teaching of his former tutor, Jon Jonsson at Modrufell, and was proud of his own

orthodoxy. He refused to accept religious rationalism and even though we know of one instance of his displaying lenience towards paupers[21] it seems as if the humanitarian ideas of the Enlightenment which resulted in less severe enforcement of penal laws made hardly any impact on him. Magnus Stephensen and his circle did not manage to influence Espolin in this respect - Espolin was basically an eighteenth century man who did not embrace the Enlightenment wholeheartedly. Detestation of everything which he associated with laxity in morals was a cardinal feature of his view of life. This attitude may even seem to border upon self-righteousness.

But at heart Espolin was a modest man, and certainly he was a modest historian. This is evident in his works. He did not regard anything he did as perfect and was not particularly proud of his enormous output. And he looked to future generations to improve upon his work.

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1 According to the custom of the country, he was originally known as Jon Jonsson, but he adopted the name Espolin (from Espiholl) during his Copenhagen years, and this became a family name.

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3 Accounts of court cases which Espolin judged are found in Brynjolfur Jonsson fra Minnanupi, Saga Natans Ketilssonar og Skald-Rosu, Reykjavik 1912, pp.59-62 and Jon Helgason, "Thetta bolvad beinamal", Vid Islands born, II, Reykjavik 1969, pp.33-123.

4 The account of Espolin's childhood is taken direct from Sg.J.E., Chapter 4. "... sotti hann og mjog fast tha lesningu, og nalega mattu adrir ei skynja, hve mikid yndi hans var af thvi."

5 Sg.J.E. p.85, p.87

6 See Sigurdur Olafsson fra Karastodum, "Ari Arason fjordungslaeknir", Skagfirzk fraedi IX. Skagfirdingathaettir, Reykjavik 1952, p.90f.

7 Sg.J.E. p.132f

8 The letters are preserved in IB.94,4to. No letters from Rask to Espolin are found in the National Library of Iceland.

9 Sg.J.E. p.177

10 ibid. p.106

11 ibid. p.177

12 ibid. p.133

13 ibid. p.158

14 ibid. p.171

15 loc.cit.

16 ibid. p.172f

17 ibid. p.177

18 Sg.J.E. p.184f

19 loc.cit. "gladlatur og skemmtinn og allhibylaprudur og vidtalsljufur vid meiri hattar og minni"

20 A story of a visit to Espolin's home is told in the introduction to Sg.J.E. (p.xl). The historian Pall Melsted tells in his memoirs (Endurminningar, Reykjavik 1912, p.45) of an encounter with Espolin.

21 Sg.J.E. p.147

CHAPTER 4

ESPOLIN'S IDEA OF HISTORY AND METHOD OF PRESENTATION

Introductory remarks

In this chapter it is intended to explore the reasons why Espolin wrote history, his attitude towards history as a discipline, and the way in which he wrote history. Inevitably, there has been considerable overlapping between the various parts of this chapter, but it is hoped that by concentration on these main themes a reasonably coherent picture of the subject has been drawn.

(1) Espolin's motivation for writing

Before examining the evidence of his own works, some observations on his background may be made. I have shown in Chapter 3 that there is no doubt that Espolin's father, Jon Jakobsson, was a great influence on his development as a historian and that the Icelanders' traditional love of history must also be taken into account, and that it is likely that Espolin's stay in Copenhagen was of importance in this respect. Generally speaking his having access to historical works, old and new, Icelandic and foreign, must have been a further stimulus.[1] It is not possible here to assess how the Icelandic tradition of lawyers writing history and Espolin's own legal background affected his historical writing, but it is a fact that his profession provided him with leisure to pursue his hobby; in his later years he had the means to devote a great deal of time to this without material worries.

Indeed, to a certain extent the writing of history was a hobby to Espolin in the sense that it was essentially a pleasure-

giving leisure activity. In the preface to Sgr.fo.No. (1800) he stated that he was above all entertaining himself by writing true stories i.e. gaining intellectual satisfaction was the chief motive for his writing. In the preface to Agrip af Kirkjusogu, the first version (Kkjs.A) (Lbs.947-948,4to.) he speaks of the work behind it as pleasurable. Certainly Espolin's interest in writing was a lifelong passion, but we must consider other factors as well.

In the preface to Ken.Sagn. he said directly that no-one who can contribute to the enlightenment of the country, may let his talent be wasted.[2] Although Ken.Sagn. (printed in 1804) and the later sections of Arb.Isl. (presumably those written after 1814 or at least those written after 1820) were the only works which Espolin definitely wrote with an eye to publication, he was obviously fully aware that his works were circulating in manuscript, which meant that he had a reading public though necessarily a limited one. In the preface to Sgr.fo.No. he said that the work was written mainly for himself and his family but went on to say that it would perhaps be seen by other people and stressed what can be learnt from the work and what impact it might have on its readers (see below). This didactic view of history, a desire to enlighten the readers and an element of antiquarianism is seen in the prefaces to some of Espolin's other historical works. In the preface to Danakonunga sogur (Danak.s.) (IBR.2fol,IB.151-2,4to.) he argued that as the Icelanders' ancestors wrote so well about the kings of Norway and

other matters it was only fitting that the Icelanders of his century should know something about the kings of the royal house which had ruled the country for so long; this extract (sic) was written in order to instruct them on that score. In the preface to Agrip af Thjodverjasogum (Thjodv.s.) (IB.150,4to.) he said that he thought it improper to write nothing about one of the most famous nations in Central Europe which is closely related to "us", the Nordic people, and from which have come most of the greatest families and most branches of learning throughout the north (um allan Nordrheiminn) and the Reformation itself, and many customs to Iceland. In the preface to Saga fra Skagfirdingum (Skagf.) (IBR.32,4to.) Espolin argued that future generations might be able to derive some knowledge (nyta til frodleiks) from it; if that were the case he would regard his endeavour as worthwhile. In the preface to the Kkjs.A he said that one of the reasons why he wanted to write about this topic in Icelandic was that the general public knew hardly anything about these matters.

It is safe to argue that Espolin thought that thorough knowledge of history contributed to better understanding of life in general - it had a moral, showed good and evil and how life should and should not be lived - and therefore history was a worthwhile and indeed very important subject. It will be seen below that Espolin thought that history, especially church history, demonstrated God's intervention in human affairs. In the preface to Kkjs.A he said that ecclesiastical history was the most valuable, remarkable and intricate of all history; he

implied its superiority over almost all other branches of study.

At a more secular level, history was also of great practical value. In the preface to Ken.Sagn. he stated emphatically that the enlightenment of the country is important. In the preface to Kkjs.A he said that enlightenment in the field of historical studies (sagnaupplysing) as well as "useful reflections" (gagnlegar hugleidingar) would be an adequate reward for the trouble he took in writing. The same desire to instruct is evident in the preface to Sgr.fo.No. where he said that he wants to "introduce events which are unknown to the Icelanders. Many things can be learnt from such accounts - love of liberty" (Espolin's conception of liberty is dealt with in Chapter 4), "fairness of conduct (drengskapur) and industriousness".[3] This is also seen in the preface to Skagf. Discussing the medieval family sagas, Espolin concluded "What makes the sagas valuable is that because of them we know the persons who lived in that period, their customs, religion, virtues, vices and accomplishments as well as the spirit of the age with the superstition, changes and lack of change in the period."[4]

An important aspect of Espolin's views on the practical value of history was reflected in his predilection for "true stories" as opposed to "untrue" ones: reliable history could serve as an antidote to the harmful effects of fictional literature. It is implied that fiction, in contrast with empirical experience, did usually not improve people's understanding of reality. In this way his attitude was typical of the Enlightenment.

Although he wrote novels and tales himself, Espolin expressed his disapproval of this type of writing in no uncertain terms. "I do not enjoy fictional stories at all"[5] he said in the preface to Sgr.fo.No. vol.I. And in the preface to Ken.Sagn. he said that the public was becoming more and more disgusted at fictional giants' tales and chivalric romances, which were fostered by the blind medieval and Catholic times (this is, of course, also yet another example of Espolin's anti-Catholic and anti-medieval bias). And when discussing the less attractive aspects of the post-Reformation intellectual climate in Arb.Isl. he threw some of the blame on the nation's lack of historical consciousness and then said that very few of those who actually possessed manuscripts of the sagas did actually read them; only chivalric romances were read because people believed in their genuineness.

Indeed, in the preface to the first volume of Sgr.fo.No. Espolin argued that the work would demonstrate that the fantastic world of chivalric romances and the rimur is unreal, all beliefs of that kind were false. The Romans did not encounter any supermen, giants, monsters and dragons; since they had dealings with all nations it is certain that such creatures do not exist. Espolin was pleased to have the opportunity to help uproot popular beliefs of this kind.

(2) Espolin's attitude towards history as a discipline and the way in which he wrote

It is worthwhile to speculate about how Espolin's experiences in life affected him as a historian. It is tempting to argue that apart from the Icelanders' deep-rooted interest in

history and the particular interest in such studies at Espiholl, Espolin sought in the world of history compensation for the humiliations he suffered at home. His obsession with his own physical strength and heroic deeds in general may have been intensified by the same feelings although there again the influence of the Icelanders' traditional interest in such matters was no doubt relevant. It is likely that Espolin had a compulsion to prove that he was as good as his stern father and therefore he wanted to be known as a strong man, a good historian, and a good poet as well as a good Christian and a man of high moral standards.

Indeed, Espolin's ethical ideal and his values, shaped by his experiences, are very evident in his historical writings. Qualities he admired in people included intellectual ability, piety, physical prowess, bravery and military expertise, reliability, prudence, and, if only in a patronizing way, concern for the welfare of other human beings, at least people of the kind who conformed to his ethical ideal. By these standards he estimated people - equally prominent historical figures and the historians whose works he used as sources; the ideal of 'a good man' and 'a good historian' was the same. Then it seems likely that the intolerance and self-righteousness clearly seen in what Espolin wrote about people who were not to his liking, was influenced by his experience of having overcome serious difficulties and gained self-confidence, and by the security that his happy marriage gave him.

Espolin did not have an elaborate theory of history even though he was interested in philosophy and thought a great deal about his craft. However, in the preface to Agrip af kirkjusogu, the second version (Kkjs.B) (IB.157-8,4to.) one of Espolin's last works, a teleological view of history is evident. There he said that one of the advantages of church history over other branches of history is, first, that it shows God's direction of true enlightenment (guds stjornun a sannri upplysingu) in the world which determines all other events (allir adrir atburdir ... luta); second, that God has found it difficult to keep the corruption of man in check; thirdly, how little worldly matters are worth compared with the bliss of eternity; fourthly, it tells the readers about the blessed friends of God and serves also as a cautionary tale; it shows the acts of God better than any other kind of history. Church history was in reality the basic history of mankind, he said; eventually it will no doubt show that mankind has progressed towards perfection. Unfortunately it is difficult to determine how far this statement reflects a notion of God's reign on Earth and how far it reflects the Enlightenment's idea of progress.

Some of Espolin's references to the French Revolution and the following period, for instance the mention of the Revelation of St. John the Divine (see Chapter 8) give a further indication of his religious determinism. But the absence of other instances of large-scale historical theorizing on Espolin's part and the limited attention which his Icelandic contemporaries gave to these

matters makes it of little avail to try to see these ideas in a wider context.

Espolin may or may not have been influenced by the Enlightenment's idea of progress, but in other ways his awareness of contemporary intellectual currents is obvious in his historical writings. In his essay in Danish, Noget tilforladeligt om Islaenderne (Nog.tilf.Isl.) (JS.330,4to.), he argued, in a true Enlightenment fashion, that there was a connection between the climate of Iceland and the country's physical characteristics in general on one hand and the national character on the other. The Icelanders are cold like the country's climate, he said; as a whole they are not devout, they are not vehement in matters of the heart, prone to anger or vindictive. Further, Espolin knew Kant's philosophy,[6] and even though he did not speak very favourably of it, there are certain similarities between it and Espolin's ideas, especially as regards Kant's normative ethics.

In the preface to Kkjs.A one can find a kind of a cyclical view of history. It is remarkable, Espolin said, that every ten generations or so important changes have taken place in the Church. Here he counted from Adam and Noah down to the Reformation. Already in his own day, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ecclesiastical history had been eventful and Espolin expected that there were more major events to come in the lifetime of his contemporaries. Divine intervention in human affairs was not mentioned specifically in this context, nor is the ten generations' cycle seen as a part of a broader pattern but of

course something of this nature is implied. Indeed, in those of Espolin's works that do not deal with ecclesiastical history I did not find any instances of religious determinism or of a cyclical view of history. Espolin's being a devout orthodox Lutheran is usually implicit rather than explicit in his historical writings.

Espolin rarely made generalizations about history. However, a few examples may be given. When discussing the changes in Iceland after the Reformation he said: "As always is the case in a period of change, even though the change is for the better, some bad and unnecessary things, previously unknown, were introduced."[7] Later in the same chapter he touched on immoderation (ohof) and went on to say: "But moderation (hof) is difficult to achieve, and neither condition lasts for long."[8] This seems to imply the view that in history there was perpetual change. A similar attitude is found in Kkjs.B. When describing how learning turned into unbelief in the eighteenth century, Espolin said that it often happened that people turned from one kind of immoderation to another (hverfa fra einu ohofi til annars); the reaction against one extreme produced another.[9] In connection with the American War of Independence Espolin argued that always when revolutions took place most people, even good people had a tendency to desire a change in government or morals (sidum), which was not beneficial to Christianity.[10] When dealing with the prevalence of superstition in Iceland in the post-Reformation

period he said: "Such things happen when people model their behaviour on the negative traits in their ancestors, or anybody they admire, rather than on his manliness and valour."[10a] An analysis of Charles XII of Sweden called forth the generalization that it had for a long time been usual that tyrants had been most respected had they possessed manliness (manndomur) and had the tyranny not been caused by ill will, but been excusable as a necessity.[11]

Nor did Espolin often put forward particularly philosophical explanations of historical developments. However, in Sgr.fo.No. he suggested that France's Age of Greatness would not equal that of the Roman Empire because the French lacked the "firmness of character" (stadlyndi) of the Romans.[12] And as will be seen in Chapter 5, in Arb.Isl. Espolin repeatedly referred to the "spirit of liberty" in Iceland as a motivating force in the country's history.

Espolin also saw history as a means of establishing people's identity. In the preface to part VI of Arb.Isl. he said that he had enumerated so many people not only because they were important in their own time, but also in order to make his contemporaries acquainted with their ancestors. The Icelanders looked to their ancestors as models and transmitters of their cultural heritage while in most European countries people looked upon the study of genealogy as a means of establishing a right to a privileged status in society. It can be concluded from this that Espolin thought that it would benefit the nation if people identified themselves with their ancestors, which was impossible without

knowledge of history and genealogy.

As Espolin took history so seriously, it mattered considerably to him how it was written, both with regard to presentation and contents. History had to be well presented - in a way attractive to the reader. But Espolin was fully aware that this was no easy task. In the preface to Skagf. he said that it is difficult to write aheyrilega (literally: "in a way which sounds well") and mentioned one specific problem which the historian is confronted with: the fact that the utterances of people are not preserved in detail. The implication of this is that historians either have to "invent" direct speech - of course without bringing in a fictional element - or be content with giving the gist of what people said on a particular occasion.

Espolin seems to have deliberately laid out his historical works in the way which he regarded as most accessible to his readers. Most of his historical works which are more than mere lists of dates are indeed "annals in story form" like Arb.Isl. Dates are usually put in the margins and the works are usually broken down into very short chapters on a non-annalistic basis, sometimes dealing with a single theme in a chapter. It is true that this approach ameliorates the dryness of presentation which characterizes conventional annals, and makes it easier for the reader to pick out the material that he is particularly interested in, but series of annals (or strictly chronological histories, to use a different definition) the works nevertheless are, and subject to the limitations of that genre of historical

writing. It is often difficult to see the wood for the trees; the account can get particularly confusing in Arb.Isl. when events that go together in a single year are dealt with in more than one place.

As for Espolin's opinion of himself as a writer, he claimed that it was not high, but stated that he took pains to do his best. In the preface to Ken.Sagn. he excused himself by saying that he did not have much practice in writing and that he was no great stylist. The former certainly was an understatement, and, in my view, the latter as well. In fact, it is tempting to dismiss this apology as false modesty. Espolin also referred to stylistic matters in the preface to Sgr.fo.No. vol.I, where he said that he chose to write in a style reminiscent of Old Norse (norraenukenndur) because that kind of style is the one best suited for descriptions of battles and goes best with the character of his countrymen. For the sake of stylistic coherence, he chose to write all proper names of Teutonic origin in an Icelandic way (eftir hordlendskri tungu), arguing that the Norwegians and the Romans even adapted to their own languages names that were completely foreign.

Espolin's language and style would be worth an independent study: to my knowledge no specialist has so far attempted anything of that kind. I cannot go any further than making a few broad generalizations. Espolin's style was deeply influenced by the sagas, it is lucid and laconic and relatively free from embellishments, solid rather than elegant; the sentences tend to

be short. Danish-German influences on syntax and vocabulary, which characterized the language of many of his Icelandic contemporaries, are relatively weak in Espolin's case, he obviously wanted to refrain from using words that he did not regard as genuinely Icelandic. His punctuation is an important aspect of his writing. His chapters are usually only one paragraph each, lavishly interspersed with commas and, to a lesser extent, semi-colons; full stops are relatively few, used infrequently unless there is a change of subject.

The contents of Espolin's historical works were to a large extent circumscribed by the histories he used as sources. He did not do much original research; that is to say, he did not use primary sources very much and not at all in his writings on world history. The catalogue of his manuscripts (IB.329,4to.) shows that he possessed a considerable number of manuscripta juridica (altogether 157 titles), such as decisions of the Althing, royal letters (e.g. ordinances), matrimonial agreements, boundary regulations, cartularies (maldagar) and petitions, and these are referred to fairly frequently. Even so, these sources are of secondary importance. In his works on contemporary Icelandic history - after c.1790 - for which the available material by other historians was limited, Espolin seems to have relied heavily on oral tradition. Generally speaking, his work on world history, his church histories apart, can be categorized as being for the most part drums-and-trumpet history in the traditional mould, and his work on Icelandic history was

largely in the established annalistic tradition with emphasis on the government, the forces of nature, the life and death of important persons, etc.

However, the notion of Espolin as a mere antiquarian and uncritical synthesizer of other historians' works cannot be accepted. He had definite ideas of what was most important to write about. As has been seen above, in a reference to the preface of Skagf. where the Sagas are discussed, Espolin argued that it was always worthwhile to learn about life during any historical period. Because of this, he argued, is it justifiable to write about a period when only 'insignificant' events took place. In fact, he said, insignificant events were also covered in the Old Icelandic Sagas. He seems to have maintained, by implication, that it is very important to be able to reconstruct the Zeitgeist. This is not possible if the historian limits himself to enumerating individual events; Espolin realized that his own annals (not to mention previous ones) were lacking in this respect. He said that his annals would have benefited from a broader approach and that in older annals far too much emphasis was laid on proper names, wonders, and consecrations of churches.[13] And he disapproved strongly of the post-Reformation annalists' enumerations of the deaths of individual "unimportant" persons. He said that in his opinion legislation and government in general, the publication of books, and the customs and beliefs of the people were of more importance to the inhabitants of the country. Espolin, in spite of his

antiquarian leanings, practised what he preached in that he sometimes stated that he left out material that he did not regard as important enough.[14]

Certainly there is a considerable element of antiquarianism in Espolin's historical works; he was obsessed with preserving frodleikur (factual information, knowledge). This invites comment on the Icelanders' traditional love of knowledge for knowledge's sake, especially with regard to personal history, which seems to have been particularly deep-rooted and independent of the intellectual climate in the outside world and which markedly affected (and still affects) their attitude towards history. It can be suggested that a small community's need for identity and also the relatively high standard of education in the country had something to do with this. But this is a very complicated matter, which is difficult to generalize about: suffice it to say that Espolin's antiquarianism was firmly bedded in the Icelandic historiographical tradition. He regretted to have to make selections within the field of "legitimate" historical matter, i.e. what by his standard could be regarded as significant enough for inclusion. In Arb.Isl. he made an excuse as early as the preface to part IV, saying that he could not cover everything now, and this cautionary note was struck over and over again. Even though genealogy had a very practical function in Espolin's view, there was a considerable element of antiquarianism in his amassing of genealogical data. It is no coincidence that in connection with an enumeration of important people,

Espolin referred to the love of frodleikur: i.e. "I hope that those to whom frodleikur is dearer than pedantic fault-finding will not take it amiss"[15]; "I want to mention the most important people in the country for the enlightenment (til frodleiks) of those who want to read it, but those who find such things tedious should skip it."[16]

Although Espolin regarded all periods as worth writing about he would not have agreed with Ranke's saying that all periods are equal to God. To Espolin, one period was more important than another. For all practical purposes it was most desirable to write about a period when there was a change in customs and the spirit of the age.

It is obvious from this that Espolin was deeply concerned with change. The strict chronological framework of his ~~magnum~~ opus, ~~opus~~ magnum, Arb.Isl. and his other major historical works meant that analysis necessarily took a second place. However, large-scale changes and long-term trends were dealt with in the portraits he drew of individual ages - in Ann.Icel.[17] and also in Skagf.[18] and Hunvetningasaga (Hunv.s.)[19] - and in various chapters on more limited themes inserted in the chronological narrative especially in Arb.Isl.

Under the year 1502 the behaviour of the bishops and lay chieftains and the attitudes of people of that time[20]; 1549: contemporary attitudes, e.g. those of historians, towards allegedly supernatural events[21]; in the chapter "Tregleiki a sidabreytni" (Unwillingness to change the religion) the ques-

tion why the population at large was slow to embrace Lutheranism wholeheartedly is dealt with in some detail[22]; 1564: the effect of new penal laws and of the abolition of confessions to priests[23]; 1574: the chapter "Vopn aftekin" (The Abolition of Arms) where the effect of the strengthening of royal power is described [24]. As will be seen in Chapter 5 Espolin often tried to analyse late sixteenth and seventeenth century superstition, belief in magic and witch-hunting. Under the year 1596: the consequences of a new law on vagrancy, which he saw as detrimental[25]; 1799: "The reasons for the lack of progress" - an analysis of what was wrong with the attitudes of the people and the methods of government[26]; 1803: changes in fashion[27]; 1803: on the state of farming[28].

The analytical chapters in Espolin's works on world history can be divided into two similar categories. In Sgr.fo.No. there is an analysis of the Romans[29] and various chapters fra aldarsid(um) (can be translated as "on the spirit of the age")[30]. In Svias. there are a few survey chapters on the "situation" and "mode of life" (astand, hattur) etc. in the country[31]. In Kkjs.A. there are several chapters, "on the spirit of the age" (Fra aldarhaetti) and on individual centuries in which intellectual life and sometimes the whole course of history in the relevant periods is analysed[32]. In Thjodv.s. there are at least three similar survey chapters [33]. In that work there are two geographical surveys[34] which set the scene for the actual history. In the Kkjs.B there are analytical chapters more limited in scope dealing with learned

men, superstition etc.[35] To take other examples, in Nord.s. there is a chapter on inventions[36] and in Svias. one on learning.[37]

A few generalizations may be made about the "portraits", the general survey chapters. Espolin stressed the characteristics of each period and compared it with the previous one; he considered the question whether it was an age of progress or decline and the reasons why. (This does not mean, however, that he regarded progress as an absolute yardstick by which historical developments should be measured; the idea of "progress" was not necessarily a key concept in his theory of history.) To Espolin, the thirteenth century (the end of the Commonwealth) and the sixteenth century (the Reformation, important changes in administration) were the most important periods in the history of Iceland (when he stopped writing the annals in 1832, it may be noted, he remarked that he expected that more "great events" would take place in the near future than had been the case at least during the last few decades), but every other period had some outstanding features. There never was a static situation; there was always something happening in the administrative, the intellectual, or the social spheres.

Even though Espolin often argued vigorously and displayed a strong belief in his own judgement in his analytical chapters and elsewhere, he had no inclination to regard his histories as definitive. Repeatedly, e.g. in the prefaces to Arb.Isl. part I, Thjodv.s. and Danak.s. he stressed how imperfect his works are,

how much scope there is for improvement, with the implication that he expected works by his readers or future generations to supersede his own efforts. Therefore he said in the preface to Sgr.fo.No.I,i; that constructive remarks would be received kindly and in the preface to part VII of Arb.Isl. that he would not feel offended if people made corrections to what he had written as long as these corrections were fair. It emerges in the preface to Skagf. that Espolin regarded the writing of contemporary history as the most hazardous undertaking in the field of historical writing; he felt that he had to justify himself and did so by saying that people in the days of old did not refrain from writing contemporary history; he took Sturlunga saga as an example. The same attitude underlies the choice of title for the last two sections of Arb.Isl.: "drafts for annals, for the benefit of future generations".[38] Espolin's attitude is neatly summed up in the preface to Skagf.: posterity can review his writings, but they will be found useful.

There is no need to ascribe these particular views to any false modesty. Espolin was fully aware that the body of knowledge about many matters in history is almost inexhaustible and, as he said in the preface to Skagf., that it is difficult to write an objective account of the past. However, even though objectivity was not easily attainable Espolin strove for this goal as he stated in the preface to part III of Arb.Isl. dealing with the Reformation period. In Kkjs.B[39] when Espolin discussed the necessary qualifications of those who would be capable of con-

tinuing his work, he mentioned impartiality and lack of religous fanaticism and a preference for neither autocracy nor democracy. The other essential qualities were knowledge of the Bible, learning in other fields, and austerity (sidvandur) and opposition to materialism (here Espolin probably meant the materialism of the philosophes).

In accordance with his high standards of historical writing Espolin was greatly concerned with source criticism. Certainly he was both credulous and often hasty and careless in his working - indeed, in the preface to Sgr.fo.No.I,i it emerges that he was well aware of the limitations which his not having written a preliminary draft imposed upon him - but his source criticism was at a higher level than he has usually been given credit for.

Espolin was fully aware of the problems involved when the sources are limited or biased. In the preface to the first part of Arb.Isl., when making an apology for undertaking to write a work of this kind, he laid emphasis on the lack of sources. This he elaborated in the preface to part V. When dealing with the early fourteenth century he complained about the lack of information about lay chieftains, the administration of the people (it is not quite clear what landstjorn almugans in the original actually means), and genealogy.[40] There are many more instances of Espolin's mentioning the lack of information about Iceland's 'Dark Age' and later periods.[41]

Espolin was also aware that sources can be misleading and unreliable. In many cases he refrained from committing himself

by qualifying what he said by statements like "some people say" or "it is thought" etc. (sumir segja, segir sumstadar, sagt er, talid er, etc.)[42] Espolin said that the first two to three sections of Sgr.fo.No. were based on oral sources only, the value of which was impossible to establish.[43] The value of sources from the days of the late Roman Empire he also doubted, because, as he said, in the age of Diocletian all learning and knowledge of history (vit a sagnfraedi) had disappeared, to be replaced by wrong opinions (rangt alit) and eccentricity and belief in wonders among many people.[44] Espolin had the same attitude towards medieval historiography, which was no doubt partly the result of a marked anti-Catholic bias and might also have been influenced by the general anti-medieval bias of the Enlightenment: hardly any medieval historians, Espolin said, were truthful and devoid of superstitious beliefs; their attitude towards the subject was primarily clerical. The same critical attitude towards allegedly supernatural elements in history is very evident in what Espolin wrote about Icelandic history, medieval and modern, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

On occasions Espolin mentioned discrepancy between his sources without claiming that one account was necessarily right and the other or the others wrong.[45] He was reluctant to dismiss an account completely unless the evidence against it was weighty; in the preface to Sgr.fo.No. he said that because historians do not always agree, no-one could disprove the validity of Espolin's version unless he could produce the indisputable

testimony of the most reliable historian living in the period when the events took place for that purpose.

Very often, however, Espolin made either explicit or implicit criticisms of other historians' descriptions of events which he chose to incorporate or to touch on in his works. Instances of this abound in his works on Icelandic history,[46] some of which will be dealt with below. To take one example, Espolin argued that it is almost impossible to believe that Grundar-Helga, a famous woman, was alive as late as the Plague of 1402.[47] He usually criticized accounts of world history in more generalized terms but he was quite specific at times. There were many lies, Espolin claimed, in what had been written (sagnir) about Theodoric the Great.[48] He said that because Emperor Constantine had been reproached so much because of his hatred of graven images it was difficult to believe anything that had been said about him.[49]

Sometimes Espolin emphasized that what he said about a particular event was based on reliable information. In some cases he was content with stating that "wise men" or "learned men" were of a certain opinion;[50] he also referred to "a man knowledgeable about genealogy"[51] and "a truthful man".[52] On several occasions, however, he was more specific and explained why he thought that a given source could be trusted. There is a detailed and somewhat incredible account, taken from Bjorn of Skardsa, of one Ketill Ingimundarson's killing a polar bear in 1518. Espolin mentioned that Bjorn was the son of Ketill's

daughter and that Ketill spent the last years of his life at Ingveldarstadir where Bjorn was brought up so there is no intermediate link.[53] Likewise, it was mentioned that what Espolin takes from Skardsarannall about a duel between Rafn Brandsson, the logmadur, and a certain Filippus in 1529 was based on the latter's account; Filippus, then a very old man, told Bjorn about this when Bjorn was at a fishing station in Skagi at the age of fifteen.[54] In connection with an outrage committed by some of Bishop Jon Arason's men in 1548, Espolin said that Andres Magnusson, a truthful man, had given an account of this.[55] The source for the account of a certain event was an unostentatious (skrumlaus) Helga Magnusdottir.[56] The detailed account of the last horse-fight in Iceland, which took place in 1623, almost two centuries before the annals were written, is based on what a man in Thingeyjarsysla told Espolin when he was young; this man was so old that he could remember Sigmundur, the owner of one of the horses that took part in the fight.[57] As for a more recent event, a ship-wreck at Syrdalsvogar in Fyjafjardarsysla in 1783, Espolin said:[58] "But this account has Sheriff Jon Jakobsson (Espolin's father) included in his annals after having consulted these men (i.e. those involved) themselves; moreover, many people know how long their ordeal lasted."

Espolin's critical faculty is clearly in evidence in his speculations about what actually happened. This subjective element is seen, for instance, in connection with a voyage of Bishop Ogmundur Palsson in 1519[59] and the real cause of the

death of Sheriff Gudmundur Sigurdsson at Ingjaldsholl in 1753; Espolin had actually made enquiries about this.[60] Even though he fell short of his own standards at times, Espolin, like Ari the Learned, was concerned with establishing the truth. Therefore he took pains to correct what earlier historians had said about a mysterious voice which was heard at Hjaltastadir, Utmannasveit, Mulasysla, in 1750. This was an amusing affair, but hardly historically significant. Espolin wrote: "I shall describe this, no matter how absurd it may seem, because many trustworthy men have written something about it although they did not know what kind of trick was played."[61] As suited a genealogist, Espolin was particularly interested in trying to establish the identity of various people mentioned in the text.[62]

Perhaps Espolin's general attitude to source criticism is best seen in his judgements on individual historians and individual historical works. His classification of the sagas and other medieval Icelandic works (in a manuscript preserved in the National Library of Iceland) according to their nature and reliability as sources as well as the preface to Einstok Arbok (A Single Annal) (Lbs.959,4to.) (covering the Commonwealth Age, written as a supplement to Arb.Isl. but never printed) prove that by no means did he take all works that were regarded as "historical" in his own day at face value. However, he regarded certain sagas as near authoritative sources for the history of the period they covered - an attitude that accords

with his tendency to label certain writers as authorities even though at the same time, as has been seen above, he did not regard any historical works as absolutely perfect. It is striking that in the preface to Sgr.fo.No. vol.II,1 (the period 395-1125) he said that comparison with the Icelandic sagas can show the reliability of what has been written about events of the same kind as those which are dealt with in the Sagas - they were a model, a secular one. In this way Espolin's view was typically Icelandic. Likewise he regarded most literary sources for Scandinavian pre-history, one of his special interests, as almost totally reliable. This is evident in Udkast til kort Synchronisme over Nordens aeldste Sagaer (where the remarkable congruity of the various sources is spoken of and where an effort is made to rationalize everything that is hard to believe), as well as in the adoption of this kind of material in Danak.s. and Svias. Espolin's confidence about his knowledge of these matters can be seen in his contemptuous remarks about certain Swedish scholars in the very long title of the work Nokkurs konar corollarium...(Nok.kon.cor.).

He passed judgements on some of the historians whose works he used in Arb.Isl. The author of Laurentius saga was said to have written in a clear and reasonable manner even though he gave rather too little attention to non-religious matters.[63] Of the seventeenth and eighteenth century annalists Espolin had high regard for Benedikt Petursson, whose annal he regarded as the best source for his period[64] and for Eyjolfur Jonsson, who

was truthful (rettordr) and whose account was to be preferred to others.[65] On the other hand, he did not regard Bjorn of Skardsa, who together with Jon Halldorsson is refered to most often of all individual historians, as a very critical historian, especially because of his superstitious beliefs.[66] Jon Halldorsson was seen in a more favourable light. Espolin said that he wrote most lucidly about many things[67] and was the most trustworthy source.[68] This judgement was passed at the end of a chapter dealing with Bishop Brynjolfur Sveinsson. Referring to Jon Halldorsson's account there, Espolin made a remark which throws some light on his idea of history. He said that contemporaries may have been too adulatory about Bishop Brynjolfur, but when a considerable time has passed since somebody's death the truth about him should emerge, and it is obvious that Brynjolfur was a great man. Jon Halldorsson's grandson, Bishop Hannes Finnsson, was also regarded by Espolin as a very reliable historian. Referring to the date of a man's death Espolin said that most likely Hannes knew it best.[69]

Even though Espolin had definite views on the value of sources for various periods of world history he did not make judgements on many foreign historians and individual historical works. This was no doubt partly because here, in contrast with when he wrote about Icelandic history, he took the role of translator and adaptor. However, a few remarks about foreign historians can be found. Espolin said of Livy that he wrote

the history of the Romans down to his own day very clearly and fully (mjog svo greinilega).[70] Those who wrote histories of the emperors in Diocletian's period were untruthful[71]; Espolin's opinion of Tupin and other historians of Charlemagne was equally derogatory; he spoke openly of lies that had been told about the Emperor.[72] In the modern period, Espolin's reference to Voltaire's history of Peter the Great is remarkable and shows his critical sense. Espolin said that the work was not very truthful because it was written for Elizabeth, Peter's daughter; it was excessively laudatory.[73]

REFERENCES

1 As for the Northern Reading Society see Chapter 3. ~~Any~~ Precise information about Espolin's library is not available, but Gisli Konradsson mentions in the preface to Nokkrar sannar fornra og nyrri tida sogur og thaettir (Lbs.1154,4to.) that most of the accounts were translated from histories recently published (nyutgefnum) in Copenhagen, which he had borrowed from Espolin.

2 "Otilbaerilegt er hverjum, sem studlad getur til landsins uppfraedingar, aldeildis ad grafa pund sitt i jordu."

3 "Ma af thvilikum frasognum laera marga hluti, baedi ma i theim heyra frelsisgirni, drengskap og eljunarsemi hinna fornu manna..."

4 "Uthad sem helzt gjorir sogur vorar maetar ... thad ad personur theirra tima thekkjast i theim, theirra sidir, truarbrogd, dygdir, lestir, atgjorvi og haettir og tilburdir aldarinnar med hennar hjatru og vantru og tilbreytingum og samstemmu timanna."

5 "Af osonnum sogum hafda eg ekkert gaman."

6 Kkjs.B p.17

7 Arb.Isl. V, p.20. "..tha vard sem jafnan verdur vid hver umskipti og tho hin tharflegustu seu, ad ae fer thar saman vid nokkud illt eda otharft, a annan hatt en adur var." Espolin divided Arb.Isl. into eleven sections (thaettir, hlutar), but it was published in twelve divisions (deildir). Here references are usually made to the divisions, but the following table shows the interrelation between the sections and the divisions:

	Section	Division
1 :	1262-1404	Identical
2 :	1405-1500	Identical
3 :	1500-1551	1500-1541
4 :	1551-1605	1541-1567
5 :	1605-1656	1567-1617
6 :	1656-1684	1617-1656
7 :	1684-1710	1656-1684
8 :	1710-1743	1684-1710

	Section	Division
9 :	1743-1770	1710-1743
10 :	1770-1805	1743-1773
11 :	1805-1832	1773-1805
12		1805-1832

8 ibid. p.21. "...en hof er vandhitt, og stendur eigi lengi um sinn hvert um sig."

9 Kkjs.B p.1802

10 ibid. p.1776 10a Svias., p.604

11 Sgr.fo.Nord.II,ii, p.629 (it is the same work as Nord.s.)

12 Nord.s.

13 The preface to Skagf.

14 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.II, p.33, p.41, p.74; III p.16f; V, p.103; VIII, p.84, p.123; IX, p.31, p.50, p.122.

15 Arb.Isl.VI, p.62. "...vaenti their muni eigi misvirda, sem kaerari er frodleikur en smasmuguleg hofyndni..."

16 Arb.Isl.VIII, p.2. "Vil eg telja hina helztu menn i landi theim til frodleiks, er lesa vilja, en their hlaupa yfir slikt, er thad thykir leidinlegt."

17 In the prefaces to sections I-VIII incl. and chapters at the end of sections V, VII, and IX.

18 Skagf. p.338ff

19 Hunv.s. Section II, p.1

20 Arb.Isl.III, p.14

21 Arb.Isl.IV, p.42

22 ibid. p.100

23 ibid. p. 36

24 Arb.Isl.V, p.20

25 ibid. p.84

26 Arb.Isl.IX, p.99

27 ibid. p.125

28 ibid. p.133

29 Sgr.fo.No.I, p.200

30 Karlunga saga, chapter lx; Svava keisara saga, chapter xlviii; p.459, p.560, p.612, and a conclusion at the end of the work.

31 Svias. p.94ff., pp.121-4, p.265f, p.426, p.522f, p.580ff, p.651f, and pp.606-9.

32 Kkjs.A p.149, p.296, p.311, p.354, p.384, p.431, p.457, p.518, p.878, p.888, p.1114, p.1499, p.1802.

33 Thjodv.s. p.669ff (year 1437), p.1133, Ferdinand II's reign; p.1649, Joseph II's period; p.1772, the last chapter (1820).

34 ibid. Chapter i, p.1f; Chapter ix, p.20ff.

35 See, for instance, Kkjs.B p.557, p.880, p.1086, p.1356, p.1495, and Atjanda old: Chapter xliv.

36 Sgr.fo.No.II,ii, p.219ff

37 Svias. p.585ff

38 "Drog til arboka til undirbunings seinni tima monnum."

39 Kkjs.B p.1755

40 Arb.Isl.I, p.39

41 ibid. p.3, p.39, p.86, p.98, p.99, p.100, p.105, p.106, p.108, p.119, p.121; II, p.20, p.37, p.48, p.53, p.58, p.61, p.70, p.116; III, p.43, p.91; IV, p.20, p.83; VI, p.21; IX, p.68; X, p.82.

42 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.I, p.7, p.10, p.21, p.33, p.41, p.44, p.48, p.71, p.73, p.74, p.79, p.93, p.94, p.97, p.98, p.106, p.109, p.112, p.113, p.115, p.117; II, p.136; III, p.38, p.41, p.91; V, p.122; VI, p.2, p.21, p.35, p.90; VII, 111; X, p.48; Skagf. p.156; Sgr.fo.No.I,i, p.7; Nord.s. p.162.

43 The preface to Sgr.fo.No.I,i.

44 Sgr.fo.No.I,ii, p.201; see also the preface to ibid. and ibid. p.246.

45 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.I, p.75, p.93, p.102, p.106, p.107, p.111, p.116, p.119; II, p.14, p.61; IV, p.27, p.70, p.76, p.121; V, p.66, p.132; VII, p.72; IX, p.7, p.91.

46 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.I, p.73, p.87f, p.94, p.95, p.106, p.107, p.115, p.116, p.123; II, p.62, p.66; III, p.33, p.38, p.55, p.81; IV, p.70; IV, p.135; VIII, p.66, p.102, p.116; Skagf. p.105.

47 Arb.Isl.I, p.104

48 Nord.s. p.67

49 ibid. p.125

50 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.I. p.109; II, p.110; VI, p.66 ; Skag. p.118.

51 Arb.Isl. IX, p.87

52 ibid. p.145

53 Arb.Isl.III, p.50f

54 ibid. p.93

55 Arb.Isl.IV, p.32

56 Arb.Isl.IX, p.81

57 Arb.Isl.VI, p.22. For other references to oral tradition on similar lines, see Arb.Isl. V, p.13 and Arb.Isl.VI, p.131.

58 Arb.IslXI, p.40. "... en thessa sogu hefir Jon Jakobsson syslumadur sett i annal sinn eftir samanburdi vid thessa menn sjalfa, vissu thad og margir, hversu lengi stod a hrakningum theirra."

59 Arb.Isl.III, p.94

60 Arb.Isl.IV, p.39. For other cases of a similar kind see Arb.Isl.I, p.18, p.89, p.93, p.96, p.101, p.102, p.103, p.106; II, p.8; III, p.14; V, p.2; VI, p.2; VII, p.23, p.27; VIII, p.8; IX, p.7, p.26f, p.82, p.135; X, p.39, p.96.

61 Arb.Isl.X, p.21

62 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.I, p.3, p.45, p.61, p.107; III, p.114; IV, p.108; VI, p.26; VII, p.38.

63 Arb.Isl.I, p.68

64 Arb.Isl.VI, p.116; IX, p.38

65 Arb.Isl.IX, p.82

66 See, for instance, Arb.Isl.V, p.31

67 Arb.Isl.IV, p.87

68 Arb.Isl.VII, p.10

69 Arb.Isl.IX, p.135

70 Sgr.fo.No.I,ii, p.17

71 ibid. Chapter xlix

72 Nord.s. p.151

73 Sgr.Pe.cz. p.334

CHAPTER 5

ESPOLIN ON NON-CONTEMPORARY ICELANDIC HISTORY

(1) The works themselves

Most of Espolin's writings on non-contemporary Icelandic history are found in Arb.Isl. Ken.Sagn. has an appendix dealing with Icelandic history written by Espolin himself. Then there are a few manuscripts: Einstok arbok, Islands stytzta timatal (The Briefest Chronology of Iceland; IB.495,4to.,11), Brot ur sogu Islands (Br.sg.Isl.) (A Fragment of Icelandic History, including an account of the period until 1388; IB.495,4to.,11); Islands timatal, litid aukid (Isl.tim.) (A Chronology of Icelandic History, with Additions; Lbs.751,4to.).

(2) The sources

Espolin was acquainted with the bulk of the available Icelandic historical literature, in printed books and manuscripts, even though he obviously did not know some of the modern annals when writing about the corresponding periods in Arb.Isl.

Espolin's "Classificatio yfir nokkrar sogar sem eg thekki" (A classification of a few sagas that I know), an interesting document dealt with in Chapter 4, proves that he knew virtually all the sagas; there seems no reason not to take his words "sem eg thekki" literally.

Arb.Isl. begin at 1262, the year when the Commonwealth came to an end and when Iceland came under the Norwegian king. In the preface to division one he stated his sources; in the text itself there are references to these and other sources. It appears that for the whole period down to the eighteenth century there were

two works that Espolin made continuous use of: Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae and Jon Halldorsson's Biskupasogur. For the early period, especially, Espolin used various genealogies and documents and letters, many of which were preserved in the Arnamagnean collection. For the late thirteenth century Espolin used, and indeed often just paraphrased, the saga of Bishop Arni Thorlaksson; he used Laurentius saga in the same way for the early fourteenth century. Flateyjarannall, which Espolin had not read in its entirety, was another source for the fourteenth century. He used the so-called Stutti annall for the early fifteenth century, and Bjorn Jonsson's Skardsarannall was an important source for the fifteenth century and later.

Espolin was conscious of the increased quantity of source materials from the early sixteenth century onwards. He had read Jon Egilsson's Biskupaannalar, but I did not find any reference to Jon Gissurarson's essay on the Reformation period. On the other hand, Espolin had read "the learned" Jon Gudmundsson's work on the killing of several Spanish fishermen in 1615 and Parson Olafur Jonsson at Sandar's poem about the same subject. Espolin seems to have known most of the important annals from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Skardsarannall has already been mentioned, and Espolin refers specifically to the annals of Gudbrandur Jonsson (the later Vatnsfjardarannall), Oddur Eiriksson (Fitjaannall), Benedikt Petursson (Hestsannall, the first part only), Gunnlaugur Thorsteinsson (Vallholtsannall), Thorlakur Markusson (Sjavarborgarannall), Eyjolfur Jonsson (Vallaannall),

and Sveinn Solvason (Espolin's main source for the period 1740-70). Furthermore, Espolin used the records of the Althing and Hannes Finnsson's Mannfaekkun af hallaerum (Mannf.hall.).

(3) Government

In an attempt to make some generalizations about Espolin's attitudes on individual themes of Icelandic history, we can begin with government. This matter has, of course, to be seen in the context of Espolin's political ideas. His essay Noget tilforladeligt om Islaenderne (Nog.tilf.Isl.) written towards the end of his life, gives, in conjunction with his historical and theological works, a good insight into this aspect of his thought. Basically, Espolin was a conservative and a convinced royalist, but it would probably be going too far to suggest that his political ideal was absolute monarchy in the eighteenth century sense. This is hard to determine: indeed it seems as if there might have been something like a cyclical development of Espolin's political ideas. The son of a sheriff, he was no doubt brought up in a conservative spirit, politically, but his stay in Copenhagen just after the French Revolution may have modified his political ideas. At any rate, it is worth noticing that in Sgr.fo.No. (which in fact go right up to the time of writing), written in 1799-1800, Espolin does not defend l'ancien regime vigorously and attack the revolutionaries without reservation; in fact, his sympathies seem to lie with the more moderate revolutionaries. But as time passed, he

seems to have become more conservative: this is apparent in Arb.Isl. and the works on foreign history that Espolin wrote, translated or adapted. He was in favour of firm government, under a king, that could maintain discipline and order. In the last analysis discipline and order would benefit the subjects, that is the worthy subjects; layabouts and tramps did not deserve lenient treatment and the nobility should not be allowed to assume excessive power; indeed, Espolin was far from being enamoured with the aristocracy as a class.

Furthermore, Nog.tilf.Isl. shows clearly that in about 1830 Espolin was not entirely satisfied with the status quo in the government of Iceland. This essay will be referred to in connection with Espolin's writings on contemporary Icelandic history; here I am concerned with his theories. As one of the preconditions of progress Espolin saw "good political order". In the same essay he discusses the issue of liberty and its different varieties: "Freedom of government only exists in certain ways in democracies and other republican forms of government; no legislation allows full moral freedom, (but) limited by political bonds can it exist at times ... real political freedom is on the other hand civil liberty and it is always harmful in proportion to how great and variable (uregelmaessig) it is."[1]

Then he speaks of "Handels, oeconomisk og egentlig Omgangs-Frihed". The first presumably means freedom for trade, the second seems to indicate financial independence, and the third civil liberties: the freedom of people in relation to one another.

It is clear that Espolin thought that it was for the benefit of society that the liberty of the subjects should be limited in most ways; he certainly detested democracy. However, he thought that there should be considerable freedom of trade. And, after all, he was not completely satisfied with the government of Iceland under the absolute Danish king. It was "innocent" to ask for a better constitution; the government of the country could indeed be improved. At the beginning of the essay Espolin says that he is not going to write at length about "oeconomisk-politisk forfatning" because of his lack of knowledge on the subject, and he thinks that there is less scope for improvement than many people imagine, but some representation of "the best and most intelligent" farmers at government level might be desirable. At the end of the essay he makes the point again in a slightly different form: the optimes of Iceland could elect a representative, responsible to them, who would be resident in Copenhagen and have access to the Government - in fact, the idea of appointing an Icelandic minister with these responsibilities was hotly debated, in a slightly different form, in the late nineteenth century. Espolin approached this matter very cautiously, but he thought that this delegate, even though not democratically

elected, should represent all classes and that perhaps he should be the representative of a national assembly.

The Commonwealth Age

In Br.sg.Isl. and in Isl.tim., Espolin deals with the Commonwealth period. A reference to the same subject is found in Nog.tilf.Isl. He says there that even though there was "constitutional liberty" in Iceland in the Commonwealth Age it was not a democracy. Even though he was a great admirer of the sagas he did not glorify the Middle Ages in every way as some of his contemporaries did; to him the Commonwealth period was not necessarily a political golden age. He suggests in Nog. tilf.Isl. that the attitude of the Icelanders towards the monarchy had been partially determined by the king living abroad. He implies that things had not necessarily been better when the country was independent.

In Br.sg.Isl. Espolin draws a comparison between the government of Iceland during the Commonwealth Age and that of the Romans in the Republican period. This is yet another example of Espolin's ability to see Icelandic history in perspective.

The later Middle Ages

Espolin regarded the age of the Sturlungs as one of the two most "important" periods in Icelandic history; the other being the Age of Reformation. However, he did not see the establishment of a union with Norway and the subsequent changes in the legal and administrative structure of the country as a great watershed in Icelandic history. In fact he stressed the similarity between the fourteenth century and the Age of the Sturlungs.

Iceland's first century under the Norwegian crown, especially the reign of King Magnus Smek (1319-1350),[2] is seen as one of the most unhappy centuries in Icelandic history. And under the year 1347 Espolin says that the Icelanders had hardly ever been subject to more oppression; this was accompanied by frequent bad seasons and mishaps (misferli).[3] Espolin was obviously very conscious of the importance of the connection between Iceland and Norway.[4] He tended to see political events very much in terms of individual officials and other powerful men; the arrival of "important men" in Iceland is often mentioned. Here Espolin is true to the Icelandic annalistic tradition of the Middle Ages in which the comings and goings of "important men" to and from the country were key events.

In contrast with the union of Iceland with Norway, the Kalmar Union in 1397 did in Espolin's opinion mark a change in the government of Iceland. After Iceland came under the Danish crown the kings interfered less with Icelandic affairs than had been the case previously, but when they did, they interfered more decisively.[5]

Espolin saw the period from the Kalmar Union and the Reformation as one of weak government in Iceland, at times approaching anarchy when the powerful laymen and the clergy oppressed the common people and in some cases made their own law. Under the year 1425 he said that this was a period of turbulence and disorder because of anarchy. The powerful men, fyrirmenn, did little to change this state of affairs.[6]

When talking about judicial proceedings (year 1468) Espolin said that the old proverb "hinn laegri verdur ad luta" (i.e. the less powerful one has to give way) was proven by contemporary events.[7] In connection with the case of one Margret Vigfusdottir he said that he did not know how it ended, but even though a courtier may in this instance have won a case against the powerful men, most people would have been unable to maintain their rights in the face of such opposition.[8] He also said (year 1473) that there had been more people who practised blatant oppression and injustice in their dealings with their countrymen than had been the case in other periods of Icelandic history.[9]

There are many references to the power of the bishops and the clergy. Bishop Arni Olafsson in the late fourteenth century was, in Espolin's opinion, the most powerful bishop in Icelandic history.[10] He was a lay chieftain and an ostentatious man, no less than he was a bishop.[11] Bishop Olafur Rognvaldsson in the late fifteenth century was all-powerful both in lay and ecclesiastical affairs; it was added that he was both wealthy and energetic.[12] The same note is struck when the so-called Vatnsfjardarmal in the early sixteenth century, a struggle between Bishop Stefan Jonsson and the powerful chieftain Bjorn Gudnason, are dealt with.[13] Espolin saw this struggle as reflecting the deplorable state of legal administration. The famous resolution of Leidarholmur in 1517, when several Icelanders demanded more freedom, was interpreted as being inspired by legitimate grievances against the power and oppression of the

bishops and the clergy. Laymen, too, were guilty of overbearing conduct (yfirgangur) in this period, however; for instance the legendary governor Lenhardur.[14]

Apparently Espolin did not attach much importance to the role that Iceland played in North Atlantic power politics in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. What was most important to him in this respect was the decline of Scandinavian influence in Iceland when the Norwegian merchants gave up trading with the country and the English and the Hanseatic merchants took over. To him it was fortunate for the Icelanders that the Danish kings eventually became powerful enough to interfere effectively in the affairs of the country. He said that Ogmundur Palsson was granted the bishopric of Skalholt in preference to a rival claimant in 1521 because the Danish kings were more powerful then than before and better able to keep the clergy in check than the Norwegian kings had been.[15]

Espolin's comments on individual monarchs in this period are revealing. King Eric of Pomerania (king from 1412 to 1442) was an accomplished and ambitious man but things went sour on him and he became unpopular possibly because he was a foreigner; consequently the government deteriorated.[16] It is to be understood from Espolin's writings, especially the prefaces to the individual divisions of Arb.Isl., that one of the most fortunate events in the history of the Icelandic nation was its coming under the rule of the House of Oldenburg - the Danish royal family in Espolin's day. The first monarch of this family,

Christian I (king from 1448 to 1481), is described as an accomplished and popular man.[17]

The Post-Reformation Period

Information about Espolin's attitude towards government in the post-Reformation period can be found in the prefaces to the individual divisions and in several analytical chapters, as well as here and there in the bulk of the text. On the basis of this evidence it is possible to construct a fairly coherent picture of this aspect of Espolin's view of the past.

Its main features may be summarized as follows. First of all the Danish monarchy had done the Icelanders an invaluable service in ensuring the victory of Protestantism in Iceland thereby bringing the"evil power" of the Roman Catholic Church to an end and stopping the "corrupting influence" of the Roman Catholic ideology.

Secondly, all the monarchs wished Iceland well, and the benefit of firm government and domestic peace which the royal government managed to secure most of the time could hardly be over-estimated. Admittedly, the governmental policies were not always fortunate for Iceland, but this was in some cases due to the distance of Iceland from Denmark. Sometimes the blame lay with the king's advisers and sometimes the Icelanders did not make the best use of the opportunities they were given for constructive participation in the government. Espolin never criticised the Government harshly even though he sometimes described the effects of governmental policy from the Icelandic

point of view and said, directly or by implication, that some measures taken or at least proposed by the authorities were somewhat unfair, unfortunate and unreasonable.

Thirdly, Espolin had definite views on the law and the administrative structure within the country. Espolin, conservative though his legal thought was by the standards of his age, did not think that the criminal laws in force in Iceland had always been just and fair. This is especially relevant to marital offences and related matters, and to punishment for witchcraft as well as to mutilation and torture. In this respect it would seem that Espolin was somewhat influenced by the Enlightenment. But he always emphasised that these matters must be seen in the context both of their period and of the penal law practised in Denmark itself; the Icelanders were not treated any worse than other subjects of the Danish king: punishments were very severe in Denmark too. It is remarkable, however, that in one field Espolin thought that the Danish Government had been if anything too lenient: this was in maintaining discipline among the farmhands and the maid-servants (husagi), a matter that was of great concern to Espolin in his own day.

Espolin saw the royal officials at the top of the administrative hierarchy in Iceland, who were usually Danes, as individuals in their own right as well as agents of royal power, and he discusses the pros and cons of their administration of the country. Espolin's basic dislike of the nobility is not very evident in his descriptions of these men - hofudsmenn, amtmenn,

stiftamtmenn and landfogetar - though many were of noble birth.

Espolin talked of the excessive power of the lay officials in the immediate post-Reformation period. He thought that some men of the leading families in Iceland abused their power. He made a generalization to the effect that the leading families after their experience of the excessive power of the Church in Catholic times were inclined to seek revenge on the Lutheran Church after the Reformation. Espolin was aware of the effects of the decline of many of the country's leading families on the power structure within the country. He was keen to analyse the characteristics of individual periods in the field of government: for instance he saw the late sixteenth century as a period of weak government and the early seventeenth century as a period of overbearing conduct by the powerful men. He discussed the changes in administrative structure established in the period 1683-88 and was clearly aware of their importance. He often saw administrative developments in perspective. When he referred to the changing role of the sheriff the personal and contemporary relevance is obvious:[18] Espolin, having had a turbulent career as a sheriff himself, seems to have thought that the sheriff's duties in his day were heavier than previously and the rewards less; at the same time their powers had been curbed excessively. This does not necessarily contradict his opinion that lay officials had oppressed the common people in the past.

The Sixteenth Century

Espolin has little to say about the royal government before

about 1550, but under the year 1551 he deals with government policy during the Reformation period. He says that some of the Government's measures were considered somewhat exacting: measures that had aimed at curbing the power of the bishops and later the power of other influential men which had remained since the time when Iceland was in effect ruled by its aristocracy. The unpopularity of these measures gave Bishop Jon Arason and others an opportunity to rise against royal power in the name of patriotism even though this was unwise in view of the strength of their opponents. The concern of Christian III (king from 1534 to 1559) and his descendants for Iceland was eventually of great benefit to the common people; it was fortunate that the kings were lenient and attentive (gjorhugulir) and used their powers wisely.[19]

The Icelanders found King Frederick II (1556-88) very strict towards immorality, Espolin says, but he was faithful and free from vanity (trulyndur oghegomalaus).[20] Espolin deals at some length with the establishment of a new penal code (or, to be precise, a court judgement that had the force of law) referring to the treatment of offences in the field of sexual relations called storidomur (the great court, literally) by the Icelanders because of its severity. Apparently the king had heard that the punishment for adultery, incest and lewdness of many kinds in Iceland was not severe enough. Therefore he sent Hofudsmadur Pall Stigsson, the nephew of Otti, another royal steward, and "a much better man", to look into the matter. The king also

wrote to both the bishops and asked for their suggestions for a new penal code dealing with such cases but they excused themselves on the grounds of their ignorance, saying that learned men in Copenhagen would be better fitted for the task. The Icelanders, however, were obliged to devise appropriate new legislation and obtain the king's approval for it. Espolin says that it is unfair to reproach the officials responsible because the king would hardly have confirmed these laws had they been any more lenient; it is well known, he claims, how severely offenders of this kind were punished in Denmark itself - even more severely than the letter of the law allowed. It is very likely that the Icelandic officials disliked applying these laws; morality had been lax and there had been no control over these matters since the abolition of the confessions.[21] It is obviously the early nineteenth century moralist Espolin who speaks here; he thought it was deplorable that the legendary couple Anna Magnusdottir of Stora-Borg and Hjalti Vigfusson were allowed to marry after they had had several children born out of wedlock.[22]

Espolin's description of the defence of Iceland in this period is remarkable. Some powerful men in the country made the Icelanders give up all their weapons in King Frederick II's reign (1556-88); this was probably intended to contribute to domestic stability, but it meant that Iceland was completely defenceless when faced with any external attack. This decision was not in accordance with the king's wishes; in 1580 he sent

guns and spears to every county in the country and in the following year a court decision was made (Vopnadomur) that reversed the earlier policy. Nevertheless nothing came of the decision. Espolin says that he does not know which was the more surprising, that nobody should heed the wishes of the king and the court decision, or the negligence of the logmenn to carry it out.[23] In the chapter 'Aftekin vopn' (1574)[24] Espolin deals analytically with these matters; he goes on to say that the Icelandic people were inhibited by the power of the king, which was a change for the better; due to the king's influence there was less injustice, mass slaughter and robbery than before. Espolin mentions that in this period the Government assumed the form it was to keep until the late seventeenth century.[25] Nevertheless, even though there was an improvement in the government, the country was in a state of disorder in some ways (margt for oskipulega fram).[26] The power of the lay officials was still excessive.[27] The stubbornness of the powerful laymen remained; part of the guilt for what went wtong definitely lay with the officials. The more enterprising people among the masses were encouraged to show resistance, but the rest became apathetic.[28] Espolin argues that people lacked the courage as well as a suitable opportunity for open rebellion.[29]

One of the most important features of Icelandic politics in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century was the dispute between Bishop Gudbrandur Thorlaksson and Logmadur Jon Jonsson. Espolin accepts two common explanations of the struggle: first,

that this was a clash of personalities, and secondly, that they had so much business to do with each other that their interests were bound to conflict. However, Espolin put forward the third reason which he thought was the most important: that all laymen supported Logmadur Jon Jonsson and encouraged him because there was an old tradition of hatred between them and the clergy. The laymen sought compensation for what they had suffered at the hands of earlier bishops; they knew that the bishop was not liked by the hofudsmadur, and realised that he was in competition with themselves. Here Espolin makes a generalisation about historical processes. He says that in a period of change, moderation is always lacking, people are penalised for belonging to a class that was previously hated, when those who were previously in a weak position feel that they have come out on top.[30]

Finally, it must be stressed that when Espolin describes the second half of the sixteenth century as a period of decline, political and administrative factors do not loom largest. He sees the explanation mainly in economic, social and cultural developments as will be seen below.

The Seventeenth Century down to 1684

In the preface to the section dealing with the period 1605-1654 Espolin says that the administration was generally fairly good, but the Government was too strict in some matters and took some unwise measures.

Most of the royal stewards were conscientious officials and tried to use their power well, Espolin argued. Frederik Friis

was appointed hofudsmadur in 1619 and given more power than these officials had had before; he brought many royal letters with him and was both energetic and serious-minded, strict, impartial and unselfish; he was therefore very much liked by King Christian IV.[31] After his death some of the decrees he brought to Iceland were not carried out; there were therefore some powerful men who did not greatly lament his death.

When royal commissioners came to the country in 1618 and judged all matters in the logretta many people claimed that Icelandic laws were not applied, which, Espolin argued, however had sometimes happened in the course of Icelandic history because of disputes of the men of rank; in fact the commissioners actually did follow the letter of the law closely and this weakened the native tradition of haphazard court procedures.[32]

Jens Soffrensen, another royal steward in King Christian IV's reign, who did not, however, have the title of hofudsmadur, is also praised as an efficient administrator. Some thought that Soffrensen was too severe in his dealings with criminal cases but he was just, trustworthy (skilgodur) and wise and enjoyed a good reputation.[33] Espolin states without comment that in Christian IV's day the power of appointing the logmenn was taken away from the Icelanders.[33a]

In connection with the ascent of Frederick III to the throne in 1648 it is mentioned that he previously had to accept the nobles' conditions because they were unfortunately all-powerful in Denmark. This interpretation of events is of course

in accordance with Espolin's general anti-nobility stand. He thought it was fortunate that King Frederick managed to curb the power of the aristocracy and impose absolute rule on his subjects including the Icelanders - the form of government that was still in force in Espolin's day. His account of the Icelanders' not totally willing acceptance of the absolute monarchy at Kopavogur in 1662 is neutral in tone and uncritical. Admiral Henrek Bjelke, the hofudsmadur at the time, (1649-82) is praised in no uncertain terms for his ability and accomplishments; he was well liked by the Icelanders; he always tried to prevent the imposition of any burdens on them. He adhered to old customs and was not fond of novelty; during his term of office there was unity among the officials and internal peace.[34]

Espolin's comments on the administration of law in this period are worth noticing. A judgement passed in 1644 was thought to be too severe and not in accordance with Icelandic law[35] but Espolin points out that these matters have to be seen in the context of the Danish monarchy. The storidomur (see above) was hated but to no avail because the Danes had a firm control over the country and applied the laws strictly in the days of Christian IV especially under Soffrensen's administration.[36] Espolin says that one sheriff, Hallur Bjarnason, was thought to be very strict in criminal cases, but goes on to point out that criminals were never treated leniently in those days.

In the analytical chapter "Aldar sidur" (1656), however, Espolin stresses the continuity in Icelandic legal practice during

most of the seventeenth century. The laws in force were Jonsbok (the late thirteenth century legal code) as well as various old amendments and a few royal decrees. He says that the Icelanders were more knowledgable in law in this period than previously, but justice was still very arbitrary and the logmenn and the logretta excessively powerful. At the lowest level, in the counties, judgements were made in accordance with the old practice by the domsmenn, not Danish law. He seems to imply that Danish law was well suited for Iceland.[37]

And even though Espolin thought that punishments were severe in this period and that belief in witchcraft and the subsequent witchcraze, which found its way into legal practice, should never have been adopted by the Icelanders, there was nevertheless one field where the Danish authorities were justified in trying to stamp out the traditional Icelandic laxity: that of discipline on the farms. In 1651 Hofudsmadur Henrek Bjelke complained about this matter and sought the opinion of the logmenn. They said that "good masters of their house should punish their subordinates, by hand, with a rod or with a ruler (palmastika)"; nevertheless this was nowhere done, or if it was, it was not efficient in checking the traditional lack of discipline; this has indeed never proved possible in Iceland.[38]

Espolin's references to the Government's commercial policy are somewhat coy. Like other Icelandic writers, he did not try to hide the fact that the trading terms offered to the Icelanders after 1602, when the trade monopoly was established, had been

unfavourable to them. But he is careful not to associate this state of affairs with a conscious government policy. In the preface to the 1605-1657 section he says that trade had been greatly limited and the terms were worse than previously. In the preface to the 1656-1684 section he says that hardly any period was less free as far as trade and some other matters were concerned. In the chapter on the customs of the age in 1656 Espolin describes the material condition of the people as deplorable, characterized by lack of enterprise and poverty. Adverse trading conditions contributed to this and also the fact that victual rent was set twice as high as it was later on.[39]

On only one occasion does Espolin denounce the Government's policy in these matters outright. Measures were taken in 1620 to ensure that the Icelanders did not trade with the English and some men who had done so were deported. This constituted "considerable lack of liberty" (allmikid ofrelsi).[40] When new prices of goods were set in 1631, less favourable to the Icelanders than the previous ones, they asked for a reconsideration of the matter, but the royal stewards refused to take it up with the king.[41] Under the year 1650 he says that still nothing could be done about the trade situation. He also mentions that it was thought worse to do business with the merchants after they had on one occasion been charged with fraud.[42]

Espolin did not take a one-sided view of the trade situation; he clearly thought that when the Icelanders had the opportunity to improve the trade situation they neglected it. In

1670 Bishop Brynjolfur Sveinsson was informed that the king wanted the Icelanders to engage in some trading on their own. The bishop was in favour of this proposal because he thought it would be beneficial to the nation and asked the clergy to make an announcement about it and collect money. But most Icelanders thought that the nation was too poor to accept the offer and therefore nothing came of it.[43] This was one of the several abortive measures taken in Iceland after the Reformation.

Generally speaking, when Espolin gives an account of those of the king's proposals concerning Iceland which were not put into practice, his attitude is either neutral or favourable to the king. During the mid seventeenth century the establishment of hospitals for lepers was discussed in Iceland. King Frederick III claimed that the Icelanders were reluctant to give money to these hospitals; he asked the logmenn and other leading men to prepare an ordinance concerning this matter, which he would then confirm. However, nothing came of this proposal. Thus Espolin says the Icelanders were usually approached concerning proposals for legislation but they often neglected such opportunities; on the other hand their own proposals were not always accepted in full.[44]

In the seventeenth century Denmark was involved in several wars and matters were not entirely peaceful in Iceland itself either. In 1625, during the Thirty Years' War the Icelanders were asked, for the first time after the Reformation, to contribute to the defence of the realm as a whole, but Espolin

describes, without comment, how the Icelanders "asked for mercy" (beiddust vaegdar) and had their way.[45] In the 1660's the Icelanders were asked to pay the cost of building one battleship but again they excused themselves on grounds of poverty.[46] Espolin does not pass a judgement here either. In 1670, however, the Icelanders were forced to pay a special war tax even though Hofudsmadur Bjelke supported their case. In this instance Espolin implies that the dissatisfaction of the Icelanders was justified. This happened in a period of bad seasons; in the circumstances the payment of a substantial levy that had not been imposed previously hit many hard.[47] Three years earlier the Icelandic parsons had made a protest against a levy imposed as a means of financing the building of fortifications in the country: only a circular from Bishop Brynjolfur in which they were asked to comply made most of them change their minds.[48] However, even though a considerable sum of money was collected, the building of the fortress was not completed. Espolin argued that several episodes of this kind had contributed to making the Icelanders reluctant to give money to such novelties even though they might have been useful.[49]

The period 1684-1770

In 1683-88 a new administrative system was introduced in Iceland and legal practice in the country consequently changed in the course of the eighteenth century. These changes, which have been described in Chapter 1, meant that Iceland was for the first time ruled as a part of the absolute Danish monarchy; the

events of 1662, when the absolute monarchy was introduced, were not followed by an immediate change in this respect. Espolin stressed the importance of these changes; for instance he mentioned that the direct interference of the king in the country's affairs increased; one example of this was the abolition of the election of parsons.[50]

In the chapter on the spirit of the age [51] (year 1743) Espolin outlined among other things the changes that had taken place in government in the previous decades. The essence of the analysis was that: penal law had been changed and modified. This change meant that disputes between the officials increased as well as their ambition. Knowledge of law increased, but judicial power passed from the farmers to the sheriffs who, like many other officials, were very domineering. For these reasons the government had no choice but to make various changes in the administration although it kept those of the old Icelandic laws that could be maintained. In Espolin's opinion the period until c.1720 was turbulent, but after that the government improved to reach its highest level of efficiency in the reign of the benevolent Frederick V (king from 1746 to 1766). The question arises here how far Espolin was influenced by the Enlightenment philosophy of progress but it is difficult to find a decisive answer (see Chapter 4). One thing is certain: that most of Espolin's judgements on the leading officials and on most of the measures taken by the government are positive - taken as a whole more positive than corresponding judgements on earlier periods.

Frederick IV (king from 1699 to 1730) is referred to as "good and wise".[51a] This Espolin did in connection with the Danish Logmadur Larus Gottrup, who, Espolin said, did more for the country than most Icelanders had ever endeavoured to do, though he earned little gratitude for this in Iceland. Many of the proposals that Gottrup made to the king about the turn of the century when the Icelanders were in serious difficulties had a positive effect. Most useful were the new fixed prices and the alleviation of "the oppression of the merchants".[52] Stiftamtmadur Christian Ulrik Gyldenlove also got praise from Espolin,[53] but Amtmadur Muller was denounced.[54] By implication Espolin praised King Frederick for not making the Icelanders contribute to the defence of the realm,[55] but he obviously regarded the eventual curbing of the power of the officials living in Iceland as the crowning achievement of Frederick's reign. Under the year 1716 he mentioned the damage done to the nation by the disputes of the officials; their short-sightedness and personal ambition led to undue government interference in the country's affairs; in view of the distance between Iceland and Denmark and infrequency of commutations which made the administration of the country from abroad cumbersome, these men were imprudent.[56]

Espolin seems, generally speaking, to have approved of the increase in the power of the amtmenn, initiated by an ordinance in 1720, which then made for an improvement in the administration. However, he was aware of the corresponding decline in the power of the logmenn, which culminated in the establishment of a high

court, next in rank to the Supreme Court in Copenhagen, in 1772, and seems not to have been altogether in favour of it[57] or the decline in the power of the sheriffs.[58] Perhaps Espolin thought that there had been a deviation again from the happy medium attained about 1734 when the violence and wilfulness of the fyrirmenn - these included the logmenn and the sheriffs - had been curbed, when most officials were financially secure and the domestic administration was by and large tolerably good.[59]

One measure initiated by Hofudsmadur Niels Fuhrmann at the Althing in 1720 was much praised by Espolin; it concerned what Espolin called bad customs (osidir), such as people not seeking permanent employment (lausamennska), excessive demands made by farmhands and maid-servants, men of no means and energy entering into marriage. Espolin is indignant at the Icelanders' ingratitude; instead of appreciating Fuhrmann's proposals they protested vigorously.[59a] Similarly a royal letter concerning discipline on the farms (husagi) in Iceland, issued in 1744, was, in Espolin's opinion, praiseworthy and fulfilled a need, but it had not been widely followed in practice. The same fate had befallen various laws and royal letters, which were put into practice in Denmark, if they were not in accordance with the Icelandic tradition.[60]

Generally speaking, not much is said about government policy in the reign of the pietistic Christian VI (1730-46). The Icelanders' reaction to the royal letter ordering the abolition of religious services on Christmas Eve is described object-

ively; the ordinance was regarded as an "unnecessary novelty" (otharflegt nynaemi) Espolin says.[61]

Espolin devoted a great deal of space to government policy towards Iceland in the reign of Frederick V (1746-1766); he considered him to be the most willing of all kings to work for the benefit of Iceland even though many kings had been benevolent.[62] Espolin analysed the reasons why these efforts were less successful than might have been expected. He mentioned the distance between Iceland and Denmark and, above all, the selfishness of some of those whom the king entrusted with a great deal of money and the lack of unity among them. Also bad seasons, lack of interest among the common people and in some cases open hostility towards the new measures and various mishaps. In a kind of an obituary on Frederick, Espolin said that he was mourned by everybody. He mentioned the debts of the state that accumulated in his reign, and attributed them to war and "magnificent enterprise" (framkvaemda tignarlegra) and Frederick's benevolence and magnificence that egotistic men took advantage of.[63]

The most important of these measures taken under Frederick was the establishment of the so-called Innrettingar factories in Reykjavik under the directorship of Landfogeti Skuli Magnusson. Espolin obviously admired Skuli and he traced the tragic fate of these institutions without blaming him excessively. Espolin passed no judgement on the Icelanders' reluctance to pay their taxes to Skuli after the eruption of Hekla in 1766.[64] Two taxation measures taken in 1764 are described in a neutral way but

it is added that the sheriffs apparently received no compensation for the loss of income that was suffered as a result.[65] Disputes over the taxation of the officials in 1767 and 1768 after Christian VI came to the throne are similarly described in a fairly neutral way.[66]

As for trade, Espolin speaks of a good trading season (kauptid) in 1734, thanks to measures taken by the rentekammer.[67] In that context, as always, the trade situation is seen in terms of a conflict between the Danish merchants and the Icelanders. Moreover, Espolin does not always take a one-sided view of the situation. In connection with the court cases concerning the so-called Flaxen Merchants, the company which had a monopoly of the Iceland trade from 1743 to 1758 and which has the worst reputation of all trading companies in Icelandic history, he says that the testimony given by the Icelanders was sometimes exaggerated: this often happens when people give evidence in cases directly affecting themselves. The Icelanders' resentment against the merchants was sometimes justified to a considerable extent, sometimes not so much.[68]

(4) The Economy, Society and Culture

The Later Middle Ages

Even though Espolin did not see the Commonwealth period as a political golden age he associated this period in Icelandic history with material prosperity and saw the later Middle Ages as a period of economic decline. The epidemic of 1494-95,

traditionally thought to be the Bubonic Plague, was the finishing stroke in the series of unfortunate events (landplagur) that had afflicted Iceland since the days of Bishop Arni Thorlaksson in the late thirteenth century.[69] But the main change took place about 1400. Espolin referred to the end of the native overseas trade as an unfortunate development, and he was plainly aware of the depression of Christendom in the middle of the fourteenth century. He argued that there had been a considerable depopulation of Iceland in the period 1330-1390;[70] nevertheless until the 1390's the Icelanders were reasonably prosperous. The bad seasons, the volcanic eruptions and the earthquakes of 1390-91 affected the country so badly that it has never recovered.[71] In the wake of these misfortunes came the Black Death of 1402-1404 which Espolin saw as an epoch-making event in Icelandic history. He refers to an estimate, which he thought reasonably correct, that the population was about 120,000 before the plague and that two thirds died in it[72] (modern scholars would see both these figures as grossly exaggerated). There was a decline in most fields;[73] agriculture was discontinued as was salt-making, and Espolin attributes the discontinuation of historical writing directly to the plague. He stresses the economic and social dislocation caused by the epidemic; those few powerful families that were left became very rich through inheritance of property, and more and more farms were acquired by the bishoprics and the monasteries. Espolin's view of economic developments was of course determined both by the one-

sidedness of his sources and by the limited interest of his age in such matters but it would be unduly charitable towards him to deny that his account of economic developments in the fifteenth century was somewhat self-contradictory. He says indeed that this century was relatively prosperous because the seasons generally speaking were good and there was no over-population, which surely implies that the depopulation that had occurred was beneficial to the national economy. Espolin does not pay any attention to the role that overseas trade carried on by English and Hanseatic merchants played in the Icelandic economy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He overlooked the lucrative export trade. The English are spoken of in essentially negative terms; there are references only to their deeds of violence and their spoiling the fishing and the trade for the Icelanders.[74]

Espolin saw the fourteenth century as an age of turbulence in Iceland. He argued that although old customs such as manslaughter and travelling around with warlike intentions were not as prevalent in the first decades after Iceland came under the Norwegian crown as they had been in the Commonwealth period, the fourteenth century witnessed a retrogression in this respect, the kings were no longer greatly feared and the bishops were foreigners who were more outstanding as travellers than as clergymen. In his opinion the changes in the Icelandic economy in the early fifteenth century had repercussions on the culture, morals and mores of the Icelanders. Apart from many violent disputes over inheritance, the spirit of enterprise was curbed and materialistic

attitudes became prevalent, leading to a cultural decline. Scholarship and morals reached an all-time low.[75] Under the year 1436 Espolin strikes the same note and then says that most people were superstitious; many believed in fairies and witchcraft.[76] Furthermore, the tenor of life in Iceland changed in the mid-fifteenth century when the bishops became all-powerful; Espolin also mentioned the effects on Iceland of the house of Oldenburg, rulers of Denmark (1448-1863), but he did not describe that matter at length.

The Sixteenth Century

Under the year 1502 Espolin surveyed the state of the country. He argued that materialism was by then even stronger than before; it had become predominant among clergy as well as the laymen. Encroachment (yfirgangur) and violence were frequent; the men who were most respected were those who most vigorously pursued material wealth and made a magnificent display (matti syna sig sem rikmannlegastan). Nothing was respected except wealth and high birth; there were hardly any learned men in the country. The hypocrisy of the bishops and the clergy had largely disappeared; the ecclesiastics were no less overbearing than the laymen. One thing that Espolin noticed about this period was that many people were more generous towards the Church than was customary in his own time; apparently he thought that his contemporaries were niggardly towards the Church.[77]

The depopulation of the early sixteenth century was, in Espolin's opinion, an important feature of the period. Indeed,

he seems to have been interested in demography in general. He refers to this matter in the preface to the 1605-1656 section. He argues that the smallpox epidemic of 1511 had a particularly bad effect on the country's economy since it was already depopulated after the plague sixteen years earlier.[78]

Espolin saw the later sixteenth century as a period of economic decline in Iceland. He attributed this partly to deterioration in the climate (the beginning of what modern scholars have called the Little Ice Age); there were now more bad seasons than before - the most severe seasons since the fourteenth century - severely affecting the economy[79] and culminating, in the first winter of the following century, in the so-called White Winter (Hvitivetur, 1600-1601). Interestingly enough, Espolin offers contemporary poetry as evidence for these developments.[79a] But Espolin did not mention the role that trading conditions may have had in the decline. Apparently he saw the period of unfavourable terms of trade for the Icelanders as beginning in 1602 when the trade monopoly was established; then there was a great change for the worse even though King Christian IV had issued reasonable regulations;[80] as always Espolin put the blame for what went wrong exclusively with the merchants.

But the decline in the later sixteenth century was not merely economic; the whole society was in decline. Espolin's picture of the period can be pieced together from the passage mentioned above, the chapters "Tregleiki a sidabreytni",

"Aftekin Vopn" (both referred to in the section on government) "Alyktarord" (Conclusion) (year 1605), and the preface to the 1552-1605 section.

Even though "the oppression of the clergy" had ceased and even though Espolin naturally saw the Lutheran Reformation as a fortunate event, many of the immediate post-Reformation developments were unfortunate. Society was characterized by a certain looseness. There was a decline in learning in general; although the word of God was spread it was not spread enough; secular motives were often important in the acceptance of Lutheranism and some were still Catholic at heart. Qualified parsons were not available; the common people were very ignorant, e.g. of history, and there was much instability in spiritual matters. Even though organised Catholicism had disappeared, superstition of various kinds remained as well as bad morals. The powerful men dominated the common people much more than in Espolin's own day. He characterised the common people of the period with lack of energy, cowardice, depression, lack of enterprise; those who were superstitious imposed sanctions on energetic people. There was no freedom of thought (thankafrelsi) and even though the excesses prevalent in Catholic times had been curbed, no proper self-respect had been introduced in its place. For all these reasons the nation came to be despised by foreigners, which in fact was undeserved. The lack of know-how and poverty which characterized this period can ultimately be traced to the depopulation of the fifteenth century, the effects of which were

not fully felt until the population had grown again up to its maximum post-1400 level.

The Seventeenth Century

There is a great deal of evidence for Espolin's general view of the seventeenth century; apart from several comments in various chapters there are informative prefaces for the periods 1605-1656 and 1656-1684 as well as the famous chapter "Aldar sidur" 1656.[81]

In the section on government it has already been seen what Espolin thought of the effect of trading conditions on the fortunes of the Icelanders. Men of rank were richer in the seventeenth century than in Espolin's own day;[82] there was more difference between them and the common people than previously, they enjoyed more respect and displayed more grandeur than later on.[83] But Espolin stressed that the condition of the common people was bad; when dealing with the year 1663 he says that even though there had been several good seasons in the previous years, national prosperity did not increase to any great extent.[84] He emphasised the adverse effects of the bad seasons at the end of the seventeenth century; these were thought to be the worst years since the end of the previous century.[85] But he mentions, for instance in connection with military enlistment in 1697, from which the Icelanders sought exemption on the grounds of bad seasons and depopulation, that even in that decade the population was growing in some parts of the country.[86] And those seventeenth century people who were worst affected by material adversity did

not of course have Espolin's sympathy. This can be seen from his reference to budsetufolk (people living in fishermen's cabins) near Snaefellsjokull who were a burden on the community. Because of lack of discipline this evil had never been uprooted from Icelandic society, but in the past the beggars had been more numerous and more difficult to deal with than in Espolin's own day.[87] Furthermore, Espolin noticed that many influential families declined and others emerged, this being a major factor of change in the social structure of the country.[88]

It is noteworthy that Espolin said of the first half of the seventeenth century that the nation's spirit of liberty - one of the abstractions that Espolin was fond of but which perhaps defies an exact interpretation - did not seem to have declined as much as in the previous period; nevertheless the nation could never recover after the upheavals of the Age of the Sturlungs and the period following (presumably meaning the following century or so) or after the epidemics of the fifteenth century. One positive development after the Reformation was that as men of rank became more sagacious (radsvinnari) the morals of the common people changed accordingly despite their superstitious beliefs. In the preface to the 1605-1656 section Espolin says that there was never less unrest among the common people than during this period and the lifespan of the following generations. Espolin notices under the year 1674 that this was a period of change as regards neither customs and manners nor disposition (hugferdi manna).[89] But in the preface to the 1656-1684 section he said that at the

end of this period simplicity and superstition declined.

Espolin saw the seventeenth century as an age of learning. He emphasized the rise of antiquarianism,[90] saying that there were more learned men in the country than before, especially in the classics. He stressed the contribution to Icelandic studies made by Bishop Thorlakur Skulason and Bishop Brynjolfur Sveinsson (see below). Torfaeus, the historian, was instrumental in establishing the reputation of the Old Icelandic works as the best sources for the history of medieval Scandinavia.[91]

But the education and culture of the common people was a different story. Freedom of thought and the enlightenment of the people did not increase even though there was an increase in scholarship among the upper classes.[92] Only in the later part of the century did the knowledge of the masses increase with the corresponding changes in intellectual life.[93] The book publication of Bishop Thordur Thorlaksson led to an improvement in the public's knowledge of history; until then secular book-learning (bokvit) had been negligible among the common people.[94] In "Aldar sidur" Espolin says that most people were ignorant and badly educated; few were literate and people were only knowledgable of such things as could be learned by heart; knowledge of the calendar and genealogy was indeed better than later when literacy had become more widespread.

The above-mentioned chapter contains several references to various aspects of Icelandic society. We are told - characteristic of Espolin - that in that period there were still many strong men

in the country. Among other things he describes the fashion in dress and the fashionable style of beard.

Below we will deal in more detail with what Espolin saw as growth of religion and the tragic witch-craze in the country.

The Eighteenth Century

Espolin's only survey of the part of the eighteenth century prior to his own day is found in the chapter Aldarhattur (The Spirit of the Age).[95] There he says that the prosperity of the nation had not increased greatly since the end of the previous century, even though good years had been frequent since the smallpox epidemic of 1707 and the prices of goods which Frederick IV fixed were favourable. When Espolin estimated the prosperity of the nation in any period he tended to look to these two factors, good and bad years and trading terms. His comments on the demography seem to echo Hannes Finnsson's Mannf.hall.

Espolin saw Icelandic society in the early eighteenth century as characterized by competitiveness, which he traced to the change in the law. Under these circumstances people were more willing than at other times to try their luck and pursue their court cases energetically, especially as there sometimes was doubt about which laws were in force.[96]

(5) Religion, Beliefs, Superstition

Preliminary remarks

I have chosen to treat Espolin's coverage of beliefs in the widest sense separately instead of including these matters

in the section on culture where, strictly speaking, they belong. There is more than one reason for this. First, these matters constitute a well-defined theme which runs through the whole of Espolin's account: behind the descriptions of different periods one can, in this respect more than some others, discern a coherent set of ideas. Secondly, matters of this kind are closely related to Espolin's source criticism and supplement what is said about it in Chapter 4.

As this part of the chapter on Espolin's writings on non-contemporary Icelandic history has more to do with Espolin's ideas and values and less with facts than some of the other parts, a broad chronological approach is out of the question. Therefore I have attempted, at the cost of considerable overlapping, to break this section down into sub-divisions following some introductory remarks on this particular aspect of Espolin's Weltanschauung. Consequently I have chosen to deal with "organized religion", vision and dreams, and beliefs in supernatural beings as separate items.

(a) Espolin's basic ideas on the subject

Every student of Espolin's historical works will be aware of his deep interest in religion, and it seems obvious that one of the strands of the philosophy of the Enlightenment which influenced him most was the dislike of superstitious beliefs, hjatru. Religion has, of course, played a crucial role in Icelandic history, but the personal touch in Espolin's description of religious matters is plain to see. When analysing his attitudes,

one has not only his historical texts, but also several hymns and an essay in Danish: "Rationalisterne og Deres Forhold til Kristendommen" (The Rationalists and their Attitude to Christianity). This fairly long essay (c.25,000 words), written in the first decade of the nineteenth century, probably shortly after 1805, throws much light on Espolin's religious thought and is an important source for the Icelandic intellectual history of the period.

The essay is divided into four sections. In the first two sections the basis of the rationalist theories is described, then in the third section Espolin analyses these theories from his personal point of view, and finally there is a brief conclusion. The reader's attention is immediately drawn to Espolin's admission that at one stage he had rationalistic tendencies himself. This seems to confirm that Espolin's ideology underwent some change sometime about, and probably just after, 1800 (Espolin took a definite stand against the rationalistic hymn-book that was published in 1804); as has been touched on above and will be pointed out in Chapter 8, a less conservative outlook is evident in Sgr.fo.No., written in the winter 1799-1800, than in Espolin's later historical works. Secondly, one notices how historical this essay is in character - there is a wealth of references to church history - and how knowledgable Espolin was of contemporary intellectual currents. There are references to the Manichaeans, to the Deists, to contemporary atheists, and to mystics as well as to various individuals.

Espolin seems to argue that the "errors" in the orthodox teachings should be recognized - this seems to be a concession to the teachings of the Enlightenment - but in these matters each individual should rely on his own reason, not that of Voltaire, Frederick the Great, Kant or anybody else.[97] Espolin divides the rationalists into two categories: the real ones, the self-confessed Deists (in a different context he says that the Deists are in fact pagans) and the hypocritical (hykkelske, Danish) who pretend to believe in divine revelation without actually doing so.[98] Espolin did not think highly of the rationalists; he thought they did not stand comparison with some pagans of earlier periods such as Minos, Lycurgos, Romulus, and Numa.[99] Even though they claim to abhor intolerance, they are "bitter" towards all those who do not embrace their own theories. In fact they are tolerant in the same way as Emperor Julian the Apostate was.[100] Generally speaking, Espolin did not think highly of those figures in church history that represent an unorthodox outlook. He says that it is not his task to defend Jacob Bohme and his equals or the Quakers, even though they are energetic, or a crazy Swedenborg, even less an irate Thomas Munster, a Simon Stylites and several "old monks".[101]

In Kkjs.B, the part of it that is not based on Holberg, written towards the end of Espolin's life, there are several general observations on religious matters in the same vein as those referred to above (see Chapter 8). He speaks disapprovingly of rationalism and "naturalismus" (i.e. materialism) and usually has

not much that is positive to say about sects and "heretics", Protestant and Roman Catholic alike.

Of all ideologies and systems of beliefs, materialism was the worst of all. There is no doubt, he says[102] that not only Roman Catholicism, but also pagan religions, no matter how wrong they are, if only they are accompanied by "fear of God", are better than the greatest human reason when it is without restraint and belief, good though reason is when guided by religion. Furthermore, his fundamentalism is obvious.

(b) The Commonwealth Period

Espolin dealt with religion in the Commonwealth period in the appendix to Ken.Sagn. and in Br.sg.Isl.

He does not have much to say about the Asatru, the pagan religion of Scandinavia. The religion in Iceland, like Norway, was full of superstition and worship of idols.[103] In the appendix to Ken.Sagn. he argues that morals and customs improved when Christianity was adopted as a national religion and manslaughter and feuds became less frequent, especially when those who had been brought up as pagans had died.[104]

Even though Espolin regarded the conversion to Christianity - to Roman Catholicism - as a fortunate event in the history of the Icelandic nation, the development of Christianity in Iceland was not altogether wholesome. The religion was purer in Iceland than in many other countries, but "Christian" superstition superseded "pagan" superstition in the country although it did not reach the same level as in Southern Europe.[105] Espolin saw a

moral decline beginning in the middle of the twelfth century, which he partly traced to the chieftains and Norwegian influences (cf. the succession disputes).[106] But this development could not be divorced from religious life which was getting further and further away from true Christianity.[107] In Ken.Sagn. Espolin goes as far as to state that "the age of turbulence" (oeirdarold) - The Age of the Sturlungs and the preceding period - was caused by bad instruction in Christianity and the hegilju-h-attur (presumably meaning superstition here) of the bishops. Bishop Gudmundur Arason "the Good", a holy man in the eyes of the Icelandic people, made a negative contribution to church matters; more and more people were absolved; the power of the popes increased steadily; laws were abused.[108]

(c) From the end of the Commonwealth to the Reformation

This period Espolin saw basically in terms of the excessive power of the bishops many of whom could be accused of encroachment in material affairs and toleration or even encouragement of spiritual corruption.[109] Espolin's interpretation of the role of the Church in Icelandic politics is mentioned above (see the section on government). There are references to the growing power of the bishops[110] (year 1358) and the unhappy state of Christianity in the country[111] (year 1388 - a reference to the bishopric of Skalholt) and to the state of sidir (customs, morals) - a matter closely related to religion[112] (year 1391).

In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries it was common to appoint foreigners to Icelandic sees. Espolin makes a

generalization about these bishops and does not mince words: they were extravagant, avaricious, and did not care about the spiritual welfare of the nation. This was the time when Christianity in Iceland sank to its lowest depths[113] (year 1436). But about the middle of the century Espolin perceives a change in religious matters in Iceland.[114] Now the bishops were Icelandic and their power greater than ever. They were domineering and did not always use their power with discretion, but Espolin grants that they were in some respects a good influence - they uprooted certain bad customs (osidir) and prevented some acts of violence (hrydjur, Voldsomheder (Dan.)) which otherwise would have taken place. The improvement in Icelandic society after the middle of the fifteenth century can also be traced to the rule of the Oldenburg house;[115] in Ken.Sagn. he says, on the other hand, that the negative influence of the bishops neutralized the positive influence of the Oldenburg kings.[116] In that account he singles out Olafur Rognvaldsson, Gottskalk Nikulasson, and Stefan Jonsson as the outstanding oppressors among the bishops, using excommunication, confessions, and expropriation as weapons in their power struggle.[117] In the preface to div.III (1500-1567) Espolin states the excessive power of the bishops as one of his main themes. It would seem that, as an anti-Catholic, he was inclined to stress what went wrong in Catholic times in order to produce a contrast with the post-Reformation period. His comment in Ken.Sagn. that in the early sixteenth century, ignorance, superstition, and tyranny grew steadily in Iceland as in other

"countries of the pope",[118] is revealing. The development in Iceland is seen in the context of the Christian world. However, Espolin's accounts of the Reformation itself are not particularly vehement. In Ken.Sagn. he says[119] that the two last Catholic bishops in Iceland, Ogmundur Palsson of Skalholt and Jon Arason of Holar, were no less inclined to be soldiers than ecclesiastics, and that Jon Arason resisted the Lutheran religion - the struggle is here seen in purely religious terms - by force, but the corresponding section in Arb.Isl. cannot be regarded as outrageously biased against the Catholics: Espolin states what he saw as both the pros and cons of the characters and actions of the two bishops. He describes Ogmundur for instance as an energetic man and a good administrator ("skorungur mikill og framkvaemdarmadur").[120]

(d) The Post-Reformation Period

We have seen above - in the section on government and that on the economy, society, and culture - that Espolin regarded the immediate post-Reformation period as one of transition in Iceland. In the chapter "Tregleiki a sidabreytni", referred to in the latter section, we have seen how Espolin explained that the adoption of what was to him a superior kind of religion was not accompanied by any spiritual improvement. Partly, there was a general decline in Icelandic society; partly, Roman Catholicism could not be uprooted overnight. We read of the difficulties encountered by Bishop Gizur Einarsson[121] and Bishop Gisli Jonsson;[122] it was not easy to introduce the right customs,

beliefs and morals among the ignorant people especially as long as stubborn people who were reluctant to give up Catholicism were still alive. Bishop Gisli did not lack the will; he made a great effort personally, orally and by letter, in the field of religious instruction. One extra difficulty was that many of the parsons were young and not well educated; they were therefore not respected by intransigent people.[123] Fear of the royal government was an important factor in bringing about a change in outlook; the contribution made by Hofudsmadur Pall Stigsson was significant.

Later generations were to reap the fruit of the work of the pioneers of Lutheranism in Iceland. In the preface to ~~division~~ section V (1605-1656) Espolin mentions that the nation became better acquainted with "the word of God" i.e. better instructed in religion. The increased belief in magic and the witch-craze apart, matters that will be dealt with below, Espolin's comments on religious life were on the whole fairly favourable. About 1640 the leading men in the country were on the whole religious and the belief in relics and other "papal" teachings had largely disappeared.[124] It is remarkable, that in spite of his fierce anti-Catholicism Espolin did not describe unsympathetically those of Bishop Brynjolfur Sveinsson's practices which contemporaries regarded as smacking of Catholicism.[125] In the description of the situation about 1640 Espolin, not fully in accordance with other statements of his, attributes the darker side of spiritual life in Iceland to ignorance of true Christian teaching.

When Espolin surveys the state of the country in 1743[126] he says that the piety that had been connected with simplicity was now very much on the wane. In this chapter, one of the relatively few analytical ones in the annals to make comparisons between individual periods, he states that the learning of the clergy had not increased significantly since the second half of the previous century. There are few other significant comments on religion in the period from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of this survey. It is noteworthy, though, that Espolin seems to approve of the intervention of the Church when it was found out that one Helgi Eyjolfsson had read Socinus; he dared not disobey when he was ordered to discontinue this practice.[127] And Espolin's account of Ludvig Harboe, the pietistic royal commissioner who travelled around Iceland as a visitator generalis in the early 1740s, is rather favourable to the Dane. There had been rumours, Espolin said, that the mission was going to overthrow the old religion, but as was to be expected, nobody could discern any change.[128]

(e) Magic

Arb.Isl. contain a wealth of references to belief in magic. Here it is useful to distinguish between the more general references throughout the period covered and those made to the witch-craze of the seventeenth century. Basically Espolin saw all beliefs in magic, in Catholic and Lutheran times alike, in the seventeenth century and before and after, as derived from the same source. But while his general references to belief in magic

throw light upon his basic ideas and source criticism, he treats the seventeenth century witch-craze as an historical phenomenon that has to be seen in the context of the age when it took place.

We shall see in this section and the following ones that Espolin was full of the spirit of the Enlightenment as far as so-called superstitious beliefs were concerned. It seems to me that the influence of the Enlightenment on his outlook was more marked in this field than any other. When dealing with magic Espolin usually either dismissed it as nonsense, to be put down to the Zeitgeist, or in true Enlightenment fashion tried to rationalize the events where magic was supposed to have played a part.

I shall first deal with some of the instances of belief in magic which Espolin sets against the background of the times in which they took place. He says about the priest Gudbjartur Asgrimsson (year 1391) that he was thought to be a magician by his contemporaries because the morals (sidir) of people were not good and superstition increased.[129] In 1591 Iceland was scourged by animal diseases. In Espolin's view the attribution of such events to the magic practices of foreigners has been too long-lasting among the common people. In the late sixteenth century many kinds of superstition and bad customs were widespread in the country. The belief in magic tended to increase as the belief in saints and relics decreased and as those who had been brought up as Roman Catholics died.[130] This is one of Espolin's two main themes in his explanation of the seventeenth century

witch-craze, and why the old belief in magic developed into a witch-craze; the other is the impact of foreign influences. In Alyktarord (year 1605)[131] Espolin makes the same point, but in a different way: he says simply that superstition remained even though Catholicism disappeared - the implication being that the superstition of the pre-Reformation period was not exclusively bound up with Roman Catholicism. As for the second theme, Espolin, in a chapter called Hjatru (Superstition),[132] says that it was no wonder that superstitious beliefs flourished in Iceland because many similar ones emerged in Germany and Denmark and were then brought over to Iceland. Below we shall see that Espolin always saw the witch-craze in Iceland in terms of the whole Danish kingdom rather than Iceland alone.

Generally speaking, when Espolin refers to belief in magic in his analytical chapters it is with an undertone of sadness - he feels sorry for the people involved. He says about the period around 1640 that there was too much zeal and belief in wonder (vandlaeti aerid i sumum greinum og teiknatru mikil) and increasing fear of magic and belief in it.[133] In the chapter Aldar sidur he notices that because of the prevalent belief in evil forces people came to practise black magic more than they would have done otherwise; many sought to frighten their fellow-citizens, which was easy because of the atmosphere of fear. Further there is a chapter called Um galdramal (On Cases of Witchcraft).[134] Espolin begins by saying that his contemporaries have reproached officials in the past for their belief in cases of witchcraft

and their harsh punishments, more than for anything else. Espolin says that he does not wish to whitewash them, but points out that persecution for magical practices was not an Icelandic phenomenon; it was in accordance with Danish government policy. Therefore it would be unjust to blame the ancestors of the Icelanders in his own day too much. Even when the king introduced his own code of law, when the witch-craze had passed its peak, the death penalty was imposed on those guilty of the most serious kinds of magic. This was a vice of the age, common to Europe. Espolin explains the witch-craze in the following terms: the common people feared black magic; many of those who were accused of it believed themselves to be practitioners and actually tried to harm others; therefore they admitted their guilt without any compulsion, and many events took place that served to strengthen the belief in magic. It was probably the essays of learned men that were ultimately responsible for increased leniency in matters of this kind; when people themselves stopped believing as strongly in the power of magic as they had previously done it was not practised as much as before. This particular chapter, it seems to me, is an example of Espolin's historical writing at its most sophisticated.

In the same division[135] Espolin deals with these matters from a slightly different point of view. How could the wise and learned men of the age acquiesce in executions for the possession of material written with runes and for suspected magic practices? Malice found an outlet in these beliefs, more so than in pagan

times when belief in the Devil was scorned. Espolin did not approve of the practice of "white" magic, which many people thought of as innocent enough and a real art, but which was forbidden by the fyrirmenn. The belief in magic lingered on, partly because the kennendur (clergy), many of whom were superstitious themselves, did not know how to uproot it; partly because it is difficult to convince every soul in a sparsely inhabited country, especially the Icelanders, who have a tendency to disagree and to be disrespectful to the proposals of their leaders (fyrirmenn). - This generalization about the Icelandic national character is very interesting in a wider context.

Espolin's view that even though there were malevolent practitioners of magic, the majority of those who were accused were innocent or at least did not deserve harsh punishment, is seen in his account of Bishop Brynjolfur's lenient treatment of pupils at Skalholt grammar school.[136] Unfortunately, in these days the possession of runic letters had generally come to be seen as no less serious an offence than absolute malevolence and the worship of Satan: Bishop Brynjolfur was an exception in his time.

Espolin traced the increased belief in witchcraft and superstitious beliefs in general in the seventeenth century to one man in particular: Jon Gudmundsson laerdi ("the Learned"), a legendary character. Espolin's references to him[137] show that he thought that Jon, through his "pupils" and through his works, had deeply influenced the common people.

There are several references to men who were thought to be magicians - often by "unwise" people - sometimes because they were learned and knowledgable.[138] Espolin also mentions, sometimes in a neutral way but sometimes with disapproval, cases of unfortunate events being ascribed to some outside magical force.[139] Espolin is equally sceptical when he describes cases in which magic was supposedly used for positive purposes, to avoid misfortune - what can be described as white magic.[140] A good example of this is the account of Bishop Jon Arason's excommunication of Dadi Gudmundsson in 1549.[141] The legend has it that only Arni Arnorsson's (white) magic saved Dadi from dying because of the excommunication (Espolin refers to Jon Egilsson's account in the Biskupaannalar). Espolin tries to rationalize this; he says that historians had not endorsed this version of what happened; in any case it would have been unjust if Bishop Jon had been given power (by God? It is clear that Espolin accepted the possibility of supernatural agents in human affairs) to destroy Dadi; Jon had done Dadi wrong rather than the other way round. On other occasions Espolin's descriptions are more neutral in tone.[142]

(f) Miracles, God's intervention in human affairs, fortune

There are at least two instances of Espolin's referring to divine intervention in human affairs without making any reservations about it or stating that this was somebody else's description of an event, but then both of these events - the survival of shipwrecked men attributed to the grace of God -

took place in the fourteenth century and it is possible that Espolin just happened to use the conventional language of the original sources.[143]

On the other hand, Espolin is cautious in his description of the allegedly miraculous escape of a man when the ice on Lake Thingvallavatn gave way and he fell through into the water. Espolin quotes the man as saying that at the crucial moment it was as if the water was held back from his mouth and his nostrils, but refrains from expressing a personal opinion on the matter.[143b]

Then there are cases when a man's fate is referred to, sometimes in terms of fortune or luck, and sometimes as the effect of a man's action on his future career. Again, Espolin tells what people thought without taking sides: it was thought that one Rafn's luck diminished;[144] the descendants of Jon of Hordubol, who left Dadi Gudmundsson's company when the latter was on his way to meet Bishop Jon Arason, were not fortunate (<u>hamingjusamir</u>);[145] after Bishop Brynjolfur Sveinsson had made a substantial present to his relative Torfi Jonsson of Gaulverjabaer the latter's farmhouse caught fire and this was by many attributed to the "sighs" of Brynjolfur's poor heirs because of the gift.[146] Some people maintained that the deterioration of Bishop Thordur Thorlaksson's health coincided with the transference of the printing press from Holar to Skalholt, which was resented by the Northerners.[147]

On one occasion, however, Espolin deals rather cynically with beliefs of this kind. The sons of one Oddur attempted to

dig for a treasure in what was thought to be a burial mound; after that they committed marital offences and their companions also experienced misfortunes. These matters were thought to be connected; such beliefs, Espolin says, were frequent among the common people until his own day. But, he says, womanizing was characteristic of this particular family including Oddur, who certainly did not derange burial mounds.[148]

(g) Dreams, prophesy

The belief that the pattern of future events could be revealed in dreams was very common in Iceland; this was a real belief at grass-roots level, not just a literary device. In Espolin's sources one can definitely find a good many references to dreams. His treatment of the matter is basically non-commital; I did not come across any instance of absolute rejection of dreams as revelations of the future. In div.I three dreams, related in Laurentius saga, are retold without any specific criticisms.[149] The Black Death of 1402 was anticipated by a dream.[150] But the seventeenth century dreams mentioned are seen in the context of the prevalent superstition of the age. In the chapter "Hjatru"[151] he speaks of unjustified vitranatru (here apparently belief in precognition in dreams, can also mean visions). Then Espolin refers to a dream which was taken to forebode Doomsday[152] as an insignificant matter (omerkilegur hlutur) related in Arb.Isl. only because it had previously been written about. On the other hand, a parson's dream, hours before his death, in which he thought he had arrived in a beautiful place, is not commented upon at all.[153]

In Iceland there used to be a strong belief in the gift of prophecy. Espolin strongly rejects the belief (a) that the ravens' croak could indicate what was to happen in the future and (b) that this could be understood by certain men.[154] But he does not vigorously deny the possibility that there might have been men who had the power of prophecy (were framvisir and forspair) even though he usually just refers to people's beliefs of this kind rather than his own judgement. Individual cases are occasionally given.[155]

(h) Foreboding spectacles and other events

One aspect of the belief that the course of events was predetermined and could be revealed to man, was that certain events, mainly calamities, were anticipated by certain sights that sometimes were not fully in accordance with the laws of nature as well as by events wholly supernatural in character. The second category comprises for instance an event which took place just before the Black Death of 1402: when people thought they heard a verse recited in the churchyard at Sidumuli.[156]

Usually premonitions of the future were visual. In the post-Reformation period Espolin sees this in the European context, as part of the prevalent superstition. When dealing with the year 1594 he mentions that the belief in sjonir and fyrirburdir became strong about that time.[157] In connection with an allegedly multi-coloured eclipse of the sun (Bjorn of Skardsa) in 1630 he mentions the current European belief in astrology and the importance attached to the celestial bodies.[158]

Another interesting aspect of Espolin's description of these matters is his attempt to rationalize, in true Enlightenment fashion, sights that people had regarded as supernatural. Thus the multi-coloured solar eclipse referred to above, which took place in the evening, is attributed to effects caused by vapour in the atmosphere.[159] Then he states that his contemporaries, unlike past generations, know the real reason why the sea or lakes sometimes took the colour of blood.[160]

Generally speaking, Espolin uses every opportunity to denigrate supernatural interpretations of sights of this kind. He does not express his personal opinion on the belief that the appearance of a certain kind of fly in northern Iceland in 1751 foreboded some misfortune,[161] but usually he at least expresses his doubts about accounts of this nature, be it an aural and a visual phenomenon associated with the execution of a man in 1627,[162] matters connected with solar or lunar eclipses,[163] "morgana",[164] a phenomenon known as vedrahjalmur,[165] various occurences after (Espolin stresses this) the plunder of the Algerians in 1627,[166] and comets, the sight of which filled people with fear, even as late as 1742.[167]

(i) Supernatural beings and others whose existence is not not accepted in natural history

Espolin was usually cautious in his treatment of these matters; sometimes he stated his outright disbelief. Beliefs of this kind were very common in Iceland, perhaps more prevalent than in most other European countries. There is no major deviation

from the general pattern of Espolin's descriptions of superstition.

His caution is seen when he tells the readers about accounts of sea, lake and river monsters.[168] In the last case Espolin mentions that Eggert Olafsson and Bjarni Palsson, who wrote a famous book about their travels around the country in the middle of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 1), had argued that the sight of lake monsters was not just a figment of people's imagination, but that what they had seen had most likely been vapour (dampi nokkur). Here Espolin expresses his ignorance.

His discussion of the alleged activities of giants is neutral in tone;[169] however, he implies that the story of a man being killed by a meinvaettur (harmful creature) in 1665 is not very credible; he adds that in those days people feared beings that were reputed to live in the mountains and they did not venture there in winter. After that he goes on to tell a story of a vagabond who mysteriously lived away from human dwellings for a considerable period.[170] Espolin says that he had included these stories because they had been written down in detail by a reliable man at the time when they were alleged to have taken place. This statement throws some light on his source criticism.

Fairies occupy an important place in Icelandic folklore and are naturally often referred to in Arb.Isl. Espolin rather contemptuously relates a story of a fairy lady whom human children were supposed to have run after,[171] and deals in a similar way with another story of the same kind.[172] Then he sneers at a story

of a man having a child by a fairy woman - he calls it an old wives' tale - but mentions that the belief in such a union was common at that time (1518).[173] A century later the belief in the existence of fairies was even more widespread, according to Espolin. This he attributes to the intellectual atmosphere of the age, the lack of crisis or "investigation of the truth" (sannleiks rannsokn), i.e. the lack of critical thought, which bred superstition. These comments were made in connection with a woman's steadfast testimony that the father of her child was a fairy.[174] When dealing with the year 1751, however, Espolin mentions that the belief in fairies had considerably diminished by then - few people claimed to have visited fairies in hills or rocks.[175] It is interesting to notice Espolin refers to Bishop Gudbrandur Thorlaksson's attempts to check the belief in fairies in order to prove how strict he was in matters of superstition;[175a] - perhaps Espolin implies here that this was the attitude to be taken by a good Lutheran.

It seems as if Espolin did not want to reject all ghost tales out of hand; he says that of all the accounts of ghosts in 1637 there were some that were more reliable than others. He adds that he relates such stories in order to show the beliefs of the time and to demonstrate what annalists included in their works, but there were many things in oral tradition that no-one wanted to write down.[176] Even though belief in ghosts had been prevalent in Iceland right from the Age of Settlement down to Espolin's day (and, indeed, down to the present day) he still

regarded the seventeenth century as special in this respect in Iceland, drawing a parallel with Denmark in the reign of Christian IV and other countries in the same period. Espolin remarks that in the middle of the eighteenth century the belief in ghosts had still not completely disappeared - implying that it was at least waning. Those who attributed the conflagration of the farmhouse at Hvitarvellir in 1751 to a ghost were even more foolish than those who traced it to a woman's imprecation.[177] But we can also find examples of Espolin's telling tales of ghosts without making any subjective comment like that.[178]

When dealing with events not associated with any other classified type of beings which were alleged to have taken place but which could not be explained in accordance with the laws of nature, Espolin was sometimes non-committal,[179] but on at least one occasion he speculates a great deal about a phenomenon (the so-called Hjaltastadafjandi in the East of Iceland - see Chapter 4) for which people had not been able to find a satisfactory conclusive explanation.[180]

(6) Genealogy and Personal History

Espolin was one of the foremost Icelandic genealogists of his own day and his interest in genealogy and personal history is evident in his historical works. As mentioned in Chapter 4, he took a great interest in the pre-history of the Nordic countries and obviously enjoyed tracing the lineage of the various royal houses. The same kind of interest is evident in Espolin's writings about Icelandic history, for instance in Hunv.s., Skagf., and in Arb.Isl.

Before going any further, it is worth pointing out, in addition to what is said in Chapter 4, that Espolin's approach to these matters was determined by the prevalent Icelandic attitudes towards the individual and society. Anthropologists argue that every small and fairly primitive community finds an outlet for its need for identification in the ancestors. Iceland would certainly be a case in point as far as this "tribal" theory is concerned. The survival and continued popularity of medieval literature in Iceland probably intensified this sense of continuity and identification with the past, and so probably did the Golden Age tradition. Iceland is not a very small country by European standards: it has always been very sparsely populated, and travelling in the country used to be a slow and often hazardous process. However, the inhabitants of individual regions did not become very parochial in outlook. Several reasons can be given for this, such as the considerable amount of migration between different parts of the country, except perhaps the East, seasonal migration of labour, centralization of government, and the relatively high standard of popular education. For some Icelandic writers, every person who had ever lived in the country was worth knowing about as an individual with his or her own name and identity, every person's pedigree was worth tracing. Even though these writers were not egalitarian and regarded the heldri menn as much more important than people of more humble birth and status, they did not see the Icelandic people as "two nations" or more; they saw the nation as a unit, all the families

in the country in a sense interwoven. The Icelanders' deep-rooted love of frodleikur implied that no piece of information was prejudged as being totally irrelevant. In view of these factors it is not surprising to find that Espolin, some annalists and other historical writers in Iceland wanted to preserve the memory of their individual countrymen in their writings.

On many occasions Espolin gives a list or survey of the most remarkable people living in the country at a given time. He refers to hofdingjar, heldri menn, nafnkunnugir menn (well-known men), the officials in the country, and sometimes to the leading families.[181] So we see that Espolin actually surveys most generations living in the period covered by his work, with the exception of the greater part of the seventeenth century.

Why did he choose to insert these surveys, which sometimes broke up the narrative? As Arni Palsson has pointed out, in the introduction to the lithographed edition of Arb.Isl., Espolin, in his annals, was trying to carry out a dual task and an impossible one: first, to write the history of Iceland; secondly, to trace Icelandic genealogy from the beginning - in such a way that everybody would be able to find his ancestors mentioned. Espolin's survey chapters were no doubt meant partly to introduce the dramatis personae of the following chapters - it is noteworthy that he stresses that he is enumerating people who lived more or less contemporaneously.[182] But in the preface to part VI Espolin says that he listed so many people not only because they were important in their own time, but also in order

to make his contemporaries acquainted with their ancestors. The same note is struck earlier: a list of well-known people will enable some to trace their genealogies.[183] We can conclude from this that Espolin thought that it would benefit the nation if people identified themselves with their ancestors; this implied that genealogy had an important practical function. But antiquarianism, which I have referred to in Chapter 4 and above, was also very relevant to Espolin's approach to genealogy and personal history. By enumerating people, information which otherwise would not come up in the account is saved from oblivion. It is no coincidence that in connection with this enumeration, which Espolin emphatically describes as being neither exact nor exhaustive, he referred to the love of frodleikur (see Chapter 4).

Espolin's interest in genealogy and personal history is not only evident in the survey chapters referred to above. He also enumerates the most important parsons,[184] the sheriffs,[185] both the sheriffs, the logrettumenn, and the logsagnarar,[186] the sheriffs and the logrettumenn,[187] the nefndarmenn (those who the sheriffs summoned to go with them to the Althing)[188] and the lay heldri menn.[189] Then Espolin sometimes relates who were responsible for a court decision;[190] in other connections he mentions everybody he knows of who took part in a certain activity.[191] In the early parts of the work Espolin suggests many genealogical hypotheses and speculates about people's identity.[192] Fairly often, when Espolin refers to a person, some of his or her descendants are mentioned.[193] Then there are several genealogical references of a different kind, that is, in terms of who somebody's relatives were.[194]

REFERENCES

1 Nog.tilf.Isl., p.12. (Continued on annexure).

2 Arb.Isl. I, p.96

3 ibid. p.80; see also ibid. p.86

4 See, for instance, ibid. p.34, p.61

5 ibid. p.109

6 Arb.Isl. II, p.19

7 ibid. p.72

8 ibid. p.44 - year 1447

9 ibid. p.79 - year 1473

10 ibid. p.10

11 ibid. p.14

12 ibid. p.79

13 See, for instance, Arb.Isl. III, p.9f. p.35

14 ibid. p.12

15 ibid. p.64

16 Arb.Isl. II, p.7

17 ibid. p.45

18 Cf. Arb.Isl. VII, p.106; IX, p.144

19 Arb.Isl. IV, p.88

20 Arb.Isl. V, p.14

21 Arb. Isl. IV, p.123, p.136

22 ibid. p.140

23 Arb.Isl. V, p.31, p.42ff

24 ibid. p.20f

25 Preface to the 1552-1605 period in Arb.Isl.

26 Cf. Arb.Isl. V, p.67

27 See the analytical chapter "Tregleiki a sidabreytni" (Unwillingness to Change Religion), Arb.Isl. VI, p.100

28 Arb.Isl. V, p.20f, the chapter "Aftekin vopn"

Reference 1 cont'd...

"Regeringens og Statsbestyrelses Frihed har da kun i visse Maader Staed i Democratier og andre republikanske Regiaeringsformer; fuld moralsk Frihed tilstaeder ingen Lovgivning, indskraenket ved politiske Baand kan den have Sted sommetider... den egentlige politiske derimod er en borgerlig Frihed, og er altid i samme Forhold skadelig som den er stor og unregelmaessig."

29 "Tregleiki a sidabreytni"

30 Arb.Isl. V, p.28

31 Arb.Isl. VI, p.7

32 ibid. p.2

33 ibid. p.120f

33a Arb.Isl. V, p.96

34 Arb.Isl. VII, p.103, p.115

35 Arb.Isl. VI, p.111

36 ibid. p.121

36a ibid. p.99

37 Arb.Isl. VII, p.14

38 Arb.Isl. VI, p.140

39 Arb.Isl. VII, p.15

40 Arb.Isl. VI, p.11

41 ibid. p.51

42 Arb.Isl. VII, p.135f.

43 ibid. p.64

44 ibid. p.16

45 Arb.Isl. VI, p.27

46 Arb.Isl. VII, p.35

47 ibid. p.94f, p.101

48 ibid. p.52

49 ibid. p.53

50 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.36

51 Arb.Isl. X, p.151f

52 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.78

53 Arb.Isl. IX, p.49

54 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.93

55 Arb.Isl. IX, p.47

56 ibid. p.30

57 Arb.Isl. X, p.105

58 Arb. Isl. IX, p.144

59 ibid. p.123

60 ibid. p.9

61 ibid. p.4

62 ibid. p.28

63 Arb.Isl. X, p.79

64 ibid. p.81

65 ibid. p.76

66 ibid. p.86, p.88

67 Arb.Isl. IX, p.123

68 Arb.Isl. X, p.38, p.60f

69 Arb.Isl. II, p.123

70 Arb.Isl. I, p.119

71 ibid. p.110f

72 ibid. p.125

73 The preface to section 1 of Arb.Isl. Unless otherwise indicated the information referred to here in connection with the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is drawn from the prefaces to sections 1 and 2.

74 See, for instance, Arb.Isl. II, p.16, p.19

75 ibid. p.19

76 ibid. p.35

77 Arb.Isl. III, p.14

78 ibid. p.29

79 Arb.Isl. V, p.32

79a ibid. p.105 (the chapter "Alyktarord")

80 ibid. p.97

81 Arb.Isl. VI, p.14f

82 "Aldar sidur" and Arb.Isl. VII, p.36

83 "Aldar sidur"

84 Arb.Isl. VII, p.36

85 See, for instance, Arb.Isl. VIII, p.20

86 ibid. p.41, p.58

87 Arb.Isl. VII, p.39

88 The preface to the section dealing with the period 1656-84.

89 Arb.Isl. VII, p.78

90 The preface to the 1605-56 division

91 Arb.Isl. VII, p.36

92 The preface to the 1605-56 division

93 The preface to the 1656-84 division

94 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.17

95 Arb.Isl. X, p.151f, year 1743

96 ibid. p.31

97 Rat.Forh.Krist. p.2

98 ibid. p.7

99 ibid. p.19

100 ibid. p.42

101 loc.cit.

102 Kkjs.B, p.1787

103 Br.sg.Isl. p.10

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105 Br.sg.Isl. p.18

106 ibid. p.21, p.31

107 ibid. p.28

108 Ken.Sagn. p.155

109 See ibid. p.157 etc., Arb.Isl.

110 Arb.Isl. I, p.88

111 ibid. p.110 - a reference to the bishopric of Skalholt

112 ibid. p.113 - year 1391

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115 Arb.Isl. preface to section 2

116 Ken.Sagn. p.160

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121 Arb.Isl. IV, p.118

122 ibid. p.124

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124 Arb.Isl. VI, p.100

125 Arb.Isl. VII, p.10

126 Aldahattur; Arb.Isl. IX, p.151

127 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.14

128 Arb.Isl. IX, p.143

129 Arb.Isl. I, p.113

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131 ibid. p.105; year 1605

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133 ibid. p.100

134 Arb.Isl. VII, p.98; year 1680

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137 For instance ibid. p.27, p.49, p.84

138 Arb.Isl. I, p.113; IV, p.77; V, p.48f, p.187; VI, p.131; VII, p.18, p.21; VIII, p.95; IX, p.4, p.32, p.27, p.41, p.52, p.94; X, p.27

139 Arb.Isl. IV, 128; VII, p.18, p.48, p.54; IX, p.115
Arb.Isl. II, p.6; V, p.123

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141 Arb.Isl. IV, p.41f

142 Arb.Isl. VII, p.49f, p.54, p.95

143 Arb.Isl. I, p.89, p.105

144 Arb.Isl. III, p.89

145 Arb.Isl. IV, p.61

146 Arb.Isl. VII, p.94

147 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.17

148 Arb.Isl. V, p.124

149 Arb.Isl. I, p.4, p.9, p.31

150 Arb.Isl. I, p.121

151 Arb.Isl. VI, p.54 - year 1633

152 Arb.Isl. VII, p.62

153 ibid. p.83

154 Arb.Isl. II, p.42; III, p.109

155 Arb.Isl. II, p.10; VI, p.17, p.27; VII, p.13f, IX, p.46, p.50

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157 Arb.Isl. V, p.79

158 Arb.Isl. VI, p.48

159 loc.cit.

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161 Arb.Isl. X, p.29

162 Arb.Isl. VI, p.34

163 ibid. p.48; V, p.54

164 Arb.Isl. VII, p.117

165 Arb.Isl. VIII, p.73

166 Arb.Isl. VI, p.39

167 Arb.Isl. VII, p.37, p.99; IX, p.146

168 Arb.Isl. V, p.78; VI, p.22; VII, p.73f; X, p.23

169 Arb. Isl. VII, p.47; X, p.19

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171 Arb.Isl. VI, p.147

172 Arb.Isl. VII, p.18

173 Arb.Isl. III, p.56

174 Arb.Isl. VI, p.123

175 Arb.Isl. X, p.27

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180 Arb.Isl. X, p.22

181 Arb.Isl. I, p.1 - the year 1262; I, p.16 - 1300; I, p.69 - 1330; I, p.77 - 1343; I, p.112 - 1391; II, p.3 - 1402; II, p.16 -1420; II, p.49 - 1450; II, p.110 - 1488; III, p.3 - 1500; III, p.97 - 1530; IV, p.91ff - 1552; IV, p.120 - 1560; V, p.8 - 1570; V, p.36 - 1580; V, p.109f - 1605; VI, pp.54-58 - 1631; IX, 104ff - 1731; X, pp.33-37 - 1752.

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183 Arb.Isl. V, p.36

184 See, for instance, Arb.Isl. V, p.40, p.113; VII, p.11

185 Arb.Isl. VI, p.27

186 Arb.Isl. IX, p.2

187 Arb.Isl. VII, p.96

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189 Arb.Isl. IX, p.109ff

190 Arb.Isl. IV, p.29, p.43; VI, p.73f

191 Arb.Isl. III, p.59, p.128, p.145; IV, p.7; VII, p.113

192 Arb.Isl. I, p.69, p.74, p.81, p.82, p.91, p.96, p.103, p.107, p.113, p.115, p.119, p.124; II, p.11; III, p.87

193 For instance Arb.Isl. II, p.27, p.36, p.123; III, p.53; IV, p.72, p.115; V, p.52, p.63, p.92, p.98, p.130; VI, p.5f; IX, p.99; X, p.25

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CHAPTER 6

ESPOLIN ON CONTEMPORARY ICELANDIC HISTORY

Introductory remarks

This chapter is mainly based on a study of the last parts of Arb.Isl., labelled by the author as "a draft for annals for the benefit of posterity", covering the period 1771-1832, which roughly corresponds with Espolin's life-time (1769-1836). Nog.tilf.Isl., Skagf., Hunv.s., Aldarhattur Islands 1832, Agrip af rani enskra 1808, and Af Jorgensen og framferdum hans, apart from the annal and the note-book referred to below, all deal partly or fully with contemporary Icelandic history, but the material in these works is for the most part found in Arb.Isl.

These parts of Arb.Isl. are, of course, different from the earlier sections of the annals, and indeed from most of Espolin's other historical works, in that he did not rely exclusively on written sources and he himself and his family featureprominently in them; there are many chapters and passages which are obviously based on first-hand information. It follows that the parts of Arb.Isl. under review are not very representative of Espolin's historical works as a whole although some of the generalizations made are applicable to the earlier parts of the annals (see Chapter 5).

(1) The sources

Where Espolin obtained his information is problematical. He mentions four written sources himself. Mannf.hall. (Decline in population because of famine) by Bishop Hannes Finnsson was

Espolin's main source for everything concerning natural forces: the weather, drift ice etc., in addition to what is implied in the title of Hannes's book. Hannes's essay covers the period down to 1792; under that year Espolin states "that it will now be difficult to relate certain things".[1] He also says that he used Hannes's list of parsons. - For the earliest years of the period (until 1775) Espolin used the annals of Sveinn Solvason, logmadur of the North (he, it may be noted, came from Eyjafjardarsysla like Espolin himself), whom he regarded as a very reliable historian.[2] There is one reference to the annals of Espolin's father, Jon Jakobsson;[3] in all likelihood Espolin used them throughout (they go down to 1800). The absence of documentary sources made it progressively more and more difficult to write the annals.[4] However, Espolin dealt with a great number of events throughout the period though he did not have first-hand knowledge of them.

At this point it would be useful to determine when it was that Espolin wrote the relevant parts of Arb.Isl. He wrote the last of his prefaces to the individual sections of Arb.Isl. - that to section VIII (1710-1743) - in January, 1829; the question is whether he had actually completed this section before this and wrote the preface separately just before sending this part of the work to Copenhagen. If so, we cannot date the writing of this part of Arb.Isl. exactly; but if we could establish that Espolin wrote the prefaces to the individual sections of Arb.Isl. simultaneously with the sections themselves this might

obviously be taken to prove that Espolin wrote about the post-1771 period after 1829. A definite answer cannot be given to this question.

It is doubtful whether Espolin had already jotted something down about contemporary events before he started writing the corresponding part of Arb.Isl. Espolin probably did this but only to a limited extent. We know that he wrote a very short annal (Lbs.959,4to.) covering his lifetime, where world events, Icelandic events in general and events concerning himself personally are dealt with in three parallel columns. As he also had a note-book (Lbs.696,8vo.), it would have been easy for him, when writing this part of Arb.Isl. to look up notes on things which he had personally experienced. But we know that Espolin sometimes did not bother to write a preliminary draft, and presumably he relied to a large extent on his prodigious memory when dealing with contemporary events.

It would seem that the information which Espolin thus committed to memory was primarily derived from oral sources. In this period annuals and periodicals which included news items were not published regularly in Iceland, and what is preserved of Espolin's correspondence suggests that he did not get much news of a general nature from his correspondents. So we can conclude that most of the news from distant parts of the country which reached Espolin - this also applies to previous contemporary annalists - spread by word of mouth. That Iceland was very sparsely populated should not be considered to be a disadvantage in this

connection: the very isolation seems to have stimulated people's interest in what was going on around them. Whenever a visitor came to an Icelandic farm - and it must be borne in mind that the pattern of settlement in the countryside was one of scattered individual farms, not one of villages - it was customary ad spyrja fretta, i.e. to ask the news. And as people travelling over long distances very often took up their quarters with the nearest farmer in the evening - there were no inns in the countryside - people learned more about what was going on in all parts of the country than we might have expected. The seasonal migration of labourers was an important factor in this.

And it may be argued that Espolin was in a relatively good position to follow events all over the country. In the 1790s, when he was sheriff of Snaefellsnessysla, we know that he rode to the Althing at Thingvellir where he met other officials with whom he no doubt exchanged news.[5] To be sure, our evidence suggests that Espolin rarely went on long journeys after he had moved north to Skagafjardarsysla, but many people had business with the sheriff and he travelled extensively over his own district and occasionally over the neighbouring ones. His connections in Eyjafjardarsysla, where the amtmadur resided and where the port and then emerging village of Akureyri was situated, were particularly important in this respect. Ships came, or were meant to come, to Akureyri from Denmark every summer, and the crew and the passengers passed on tidings from the outside world.

(2) The structure and the contents of this part of Arb.Isl.

The structure of the annals under review does not differ from the earlier parts: the work is divided on a non-annalistic basis into short chapters, the average length of which is in the region of one printed page or c.400 words,while the account of the whole period fills 331 pages. Some of the chapters are devoted to a single item: approximately one fifth in division IX and proportionately twice as many in division X.

The subject-matter can be divided into six main categories which will be dealt with in turn: (a) matters concerning nature and the condition of the people, (b) law and government, (c) culture, (d) obituaries, (e) genealogy and personal history, (f) matters of personal significance, having to do with Espolin himself, his family and environment. The last category is, of course, exclusive to our period, but otherwise Espolin presented the basic ingredients of the annals, its skeleton, in much the same way as when writing about earlier periods (see Chapter 5). However, the chapters on contemporary history which have a single theme are usually more detailed - they are often obviously based on the accounts of eye-witnesses - than corresponding chapters in the earlier parts of the annals. The best example of this is the account of Jorgen Jorgensen's stay in Iceland in 1809, to which as many as fifteen pages are devoted.[6]

(3) Nature and the condition of the people

As dealt with in Chapter 1, the Icelanders have had to struggle extremely hard for their existence through the centuries.

Consequently it was natural that Espolin and other Icelandic annalists devoted a great deal of space to the operation of natural forces and to the condition of the people. In his index Espolin classified these matters under the following headwords: good and bad seasons, volcanic eruptions, submarine volcanic eruptions, fall of volcanic ash, earthquakes, avalanches, landslides, floods, floods caused by volcanic eruptions in glaciers, violent gales, blizzards, heavy snowfalls, severe frosts, lightning, conflagrations of birch-woods, conflagrations of houses, driftwood, whales drifting ashore, fishing, bad fishing, shark-fishing, seal-catching, salt-making, shipwrecks, people drowning, fishermen struggling to reach the coast, farming, growth of grass, growing of vegetables, grass-maggot, loss of sheep from starvation, loss of sheep because of accidents, loss of lambs in the lambing season, distemper in dogs, sheep-diseases, accidents, cow-pox, cases of leprosy, epidemics, death of children, famine, trade.

Above all, Espolin was concerned with the weather, whether the seasons were good or bad. The Icelandic calendar divided the year into two seasons: summer (from late April to late October) and winter; this conception of time somewhat influenced the structure of Espolin's narrative. But the first thing he said about a particular year was usually what the weather was like during its first three or four months. Did the polar ice block the coasts, were there particularly heavy snowfalls and violent blizzards? Did livestock starve to death, and was there

famine? All fatal accidents are accounted for - people dying of exposure, etc. The main fishing season in Iceland in this period was late winter and the readers are told whether it was good or bad; shipwrecks are enumerated and the number of fishermen who perished is given. Incidents of whales drifting ashore, which provided the semi-starved population with a large quantity of extra food, are also reported. - Spring and summer were sometimes dealt with together - the division of the year in the Icelandic calendar is relevant to this. The most important question here was what the harvest, that is the hay-crop, was like. As for the autumn, Espolin was interested in depth of snowfall and the number of livestock kept from slaughter. The weather of early winter was described largely in the same terms as the weather of late winter.

Espolin tried to establish the effects of natural disasters and epidemics on the condition of the nation as a whole; here, of course, he relied heavily on Hannes Finnsson, who seems to have influenced his understanding of this element in Icelandic history as well as having supplied him with facts. Espolin realized the importance of the fluctuations in the material prosperity of the Icelanders and the role which trading conditions, to which he often referred, played in this (see Chapter 1). For various reasons, trade was a matter which deserved frequent comment. The terms offered by the individual trading companies differed considerably and the terms offered by the same trading company could differ from year to year. Furthermore, the

hostilities between the Danish and the British during the Napoleonic Wars caused severe dislocation of trade with Iceland.

(4) Government and law

This category comprises, according to Espolin's own classification in his index, the following items: the Althing, commissions and commissaries, sentences passed, dismissals from office, medals awarded, disputes between important people, ordinances from the chancery, the high court, legislation and "royal letters" e.g. rescripts or ordinances, executions, murders, thefts, the selling of the estates of the bishoprics, criminal cases, titles granted, appointments to various offices: those of amtmadur, sheriff, bishop, archdeacon, parson.

As for the administrative system in Iceland, reference can be made to Chapter 1. As Iceland was a part of the absolute Danish-Norwegian monarchy all legislation took the form of rescripts and was announced in Iceland through "royal letters" despatched to the country with the ships that arrived in spring or early summer. Espolin usually stated what the subject-matter of the "royal letters" was; also if any were issued which did not arrive the same year. But in some cases he said openly that he regarded the "royal letters" as irrelevant and sometimes he did not bother to enumerate them all. In reality, Espolin, loyal monarchist though he was, was somewhat critical of the way in which Iceland was governed, and he was aware that the Government did not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of Icelandic affairs. Generally speaking, he seems to have regarded the

Government as too bureaucratic - interfering in matters where no guidance from outside was needed.

This is, for instance, evident in the chapter "Orsakir framfaraæleysisins" (The Reasons for the Lack of Progress).[7] There Espolin begins by saying that it is incredible that everything which the kings of Denmark have done to improve things in Iceland and make it like other countries has been of little avail. He goes on to discuss the reasons for this: the kings had to rely on unsound information - the highest officials in the country sometimes tried to use their position for their own advantage and did not care even though old customs were abandoned without anything better replacing them. Moreover, the Government went too far in its desire to introduce Danish practices into Iceland. On occasion, Espolin criticized individual acts of the Government, e.g. the appointment of Danes as sheriffs in Iceland (it seemed as if the rentekammer thought that similar appointments had not been unsuccessful previously, Espolin said, somewhat contemptuously)[8] and, secondly, a letter from the kancelli to the effect that burials were not to take place until the deaths of the persons in question had been publicly announced. This would be difficult to carry out in Iceland because of the poor state of communications, Espolin remarks.[9]

As mentioned above, Espolin described Jorgen Jorgensen's brief "reign" in Iceland in detail, and he also dealt at length with the top officials of the Danish Government in Iceland - men

like Landfogeti Skuli Magnusson, Stiftamtmadur Olafur Stefansson, Amtmadur Stefan Thorarinsson, and Chief Justice Magnus Stephensen. Their private lives are described as well as their public activities. Espolin's interest in personal history and also his parochial family outlook is no doubt reflected in this. Of the four Icelanders mentioned only Skuli was not a close relative. These are points which we will come to later.

But Espolin - not unnaturally since he was a sheriff by profession himself - was also interested in administration at a lower level. Sheriffs bulk large in the annals and so do legal - mostly criminal - cases. Espolin, when appeals were made, was not content with giving just the outcome of a particular case. The judicial system in Iceland was complicated; sentences were first passed by the local sheriff, then an appeal could be made - until 1800 - to the Althing, after that to the landsyfirrettur (high court) in Reykjavik, and a further, final appeal could then be made to the Supreme Court in Copenhagen. Espolin dealt with every major case, but he gave particular attention to those which attracted most attention at the time such as the inquiry into the circumstances of the death of the brothers from Reynistadur,[10] the murders at Sjounda,[11] the plunder at Kambur,[12] and the crimes committed in Hunavatnssysla in the early nineteenth century.[13]

Crime and punishment was indeed one of the subjects Espolin felt strongly about (see Chapter 3), and his views on these matters are often explicit. The attitude towards penal law was undergoing

a change in Iceland in this period. The humanitarian ideas of the Enlightenment were gaining ground, largely thanks to Magnus Stephensen. Espolin, on the other hand, was an ardent champion of the old order. He regretted the trend towards less severe enforcement of penal laws, which was, for instance, seen in the landsyfirrettur and the Supreme Court mitigating the sentences passed by the sheriffs. Consequently, Espolin comments on these matters usually took the form of lamentation over the prevalent "softness" towards those who had committed offences. He thought that this would encourage criminals and would-be criminals and thus do harm to law-abiding subjects and in general spoil the morals of the country. He regretted the abolition of the pillory in 1808[14] and he said openly that it was bad that it was no longer legal to use threats to call forth confessions and that the guilt of the accused now had to be proved beyond doubt before conviction: "Many criminals were now confident that they would never be found out."[15] In connection with Magnus Stephensen's pamphlet on fornication in which the increasing leniency of the Government was defended Espolin said that the deterioration of the situation could be traced almost year by year.[16] His indignation is obvious when he describes how "cases of adultery were still more leniently dealt with" in 1821.[17] The same is seen when Amtmadur Grimur Jonsson's cancellation of fines for adultery, at the intercession of the innocent party and with the permission of the king, is described.[18] And Espolin was very indignant at Magnus Stephensen's "narrow" interpretation of the powers of the hreppstjorar as put

forward in a book of his which explained the laws in force in the country.[19]

(5) Culture

Espolin lived in an age when Icelandic culture was flourishing (see Chapter 1). Given this situation and Espolin's personal interest in intellectual pursuits, it was only natural that culture featured prominently in the contemporary sections of the annals. Under the heading "Culture" we include (in the terms of Espolin's index again): primary schools, reading societies, literary societies, news magazines, visitors from abroad, a jubilee, fashion in dress, Icelandic students abroad, verses, The Bible Society, "the transfer of the school", "the search for a treasure".

One of the outstanding features here is that Espolin mentioned the publication of every single book written by Icelanders (some of these were actually published in Copenhagen) and sometimes commented on these. The controversial publications of Magnus Stephensen's Landsuppfraedingarfelag had a fair share of his attention.[20]

Espolin took great interest in Icelandic scholars abroad and in the Icelandic intelligentsia in general. It is no coincidence that when making value judgements on people he often praised them for being "intelligent" or "learned". A minor poet himself, Espolin was interested in poetry, and he sometimes quoted quatrains and even longer poems (one, for instance, which surveyed the eighteenth century in Iceland);[21] sometimes he expressed his

personal opinion, or that of the general public, about individual poets and their poems.

As we could expect from a man who has been abroad and worked extensively both on the history of his own country and that of the outside world, Espolin did not regard the history of Iceland as an isolated phenomenon. In the part of Arb.Isl. under review he sometimes mentioned events abroad which were to have important consequences for Iceland, and he was equally conscious of cultural interaction between Iceland and other countries. Consequently Espolin regarded the visits of distinguished foreigners to Iceland as significant. In our period many famous men travelled around Iceland, some of whom wrote accounts of their journeys, e.g. Sir Joseph Banks, accompanied by the Swedish bishop Uno von Troil, the English botanist W.J. Hooker, the Scottish minister Rev. Ebenezer Henderson and the Danish philologist Rasmus Chr. Rask. Espolin had a great deal to say about the last two: Rask's visit to Espolin had important consequences, and because of his religious outlook Espolin no doubt felt an affinity with the Scotsman, who played a significant role in the history of the Icelandic church (see Chapter 1).

Theology was indeed one of Espolin's main intellectual interests. He wrote treatises on the subject and was very proud of his orthodoxy. Churchmen had, of course, a very important function in Icelandic society, and there was nothing unusual about Espolin's reporting the appointments and deaths of parsons, as well as those of archdeacons and bishops and his describing

the activities of some of these. Because of his strong views on these matters, the struggle between religious rationalism and orthodoxy is well reflected in the annals.

We can, for instance, consider Espolin's comment on Niemeyer's apparently rationalistic theology primer[22] and the many references to the publication of pamphlets by Parson Jon of Modrufell.[23] The close connections (see Chapter 3) between Espolin and Parson Jon of course partly account for this, but Espolin sincerely welcomed this contribution from Parson Jon, the leader of the orthodox revival in Iceland: (the pamphlets) "... were received favourably by some people. ... many were indifferent as always is the case; and the pamphlets met with mixed reception from some, who nevertheless regarded themselves as clever."[24] On the other hand, Espolin was not convinced of the value of Arni Helgason's book of sermons, published in 1821. "It was a learned and a well written work, but some people thought that it smacked of the theories of the Pelagians - not accepting the view that man is inherently evil." Espolin regarded the book as too philosophical, but he thought that it was to Arni's merit that he did not follow Socinus and others who denied the divinity and redemption of Jesus Christ.[25] - Further Espolin's attitude towards the Icelandic Bible Society, which represented rationalistic elements, is worth noticing. It was thought that there was something suspicious about the financial accounts of the Society with regard to its publication of the New Testament, and Espolin devoted much space to this.[26]

The questions arise whether Espolin deliberately wanted to denigrate the Society, or why he described its affairs so minutely?

Having investigated Espolin's views on penal law and religion it is not surprising to find that he concerned himself with the morals of the country. He referred to morality in general terms when he attempted to draw a picture of the age and also elsewhere dealt with specific aspects of the matter. The material progress and the enlightenment of the people pleased Espolin, but he regretted the social consequences of the changes.

When surveying the eighteenth century[27] he touched on the progress which had been made in various fields: drunkenness had diminished for instance, and the population on the whole had become more prudent. However, people were envious and inclined to petty quarrelling. Lausingjar (presumably people without permanent occupation) were not kept under strict enough control; nor was the institution of marriage. Espolin was particularly worried about the decline of sexual morality; he remarked, for instance, that in that period it became difficult to keep men away from their concubines. At the end of the work, in his survey of the early nineteenth century, he complained that conceit, voluptuousness, and fondness of finery were becoming widespread among the common people and that farm-hands and maid-servants were making extravagant demands and becoming resentful of discipline.[28]

Espolin's antiquarianism is sometimes evident. He was, for instance, obviously interested in the search for a buried treasure in the district of Borgarfjordur in 1826.[29] Then he described in detail the observations one Magnus Sigurdarson made when he ascended Eyjafjallajokull, the glacier, after a volcanic eruption had started there in 1823. Icelandic annalists had, understandably, always regarded volcanic eruptions as important events, but in this case Espolin was concerned with a geographical discovery.[30]

(6) Obituaries

One of the basic elements in Icelandic annals as a whole is that the deaths of important men are nearly always noticed. This is very prominent in Espolin's annals, but often he was not content with just mentioning names - his comments on the deceased are lengthy enough to be called obituaries. But it must, however, be emphasized that although fatal accidents are an essential component of Espolin's annals the names of those who died in that way were seldom mentioned.

Now, whom did Espolin select for inclusion, and what did he say about these people? Primarily he was concerned with the so-called heldri menn, such as sheriffs and parsons and sometimes the wives of these officials. We are told something about the character of the deceased, their appearance (especially with regard to their physique), learning, and popularity. Commemorative poems are often referred to. But Espolin made value judgements of people not only in connection with their death; when he described

individual events he often made value judgements about those involved, or indicated what "people" said about them. Of the approximately fifty value judgements in the 1821-25 section of Arb.Isl., a low proportion, or seven, are found in the obituaries.

(7) Genealogy and personal history

Espolin's desire to preserve information about individuals and families is evident in the contemporary sections of Arb.Isl. as well as in the earlier ones. But this was nothing unusual: the Icelanders have always been inclined to see the position of people in a genealogical network as an essential part of their identity (see Chapters 4 and 5). It was important to know hverra manna (i.e. of what family) somebody was: what his background was in terms of individual ancestors no less than in terms of position in society.

Early in division IX there are four chapters which deal with individual families,[31] and there are several chapters with short comments on various men of high social rank. The most interesting of these chapters is one at the end of division IX[32] which includes succinct descriptions, somewhat reminiscent of the sagas, of all the sheriffs in the country and a few other high secular officials. The annals, moreover, contain a wealth of varied information about certain important men; by fitting together the bits and pieces we get fairly detailed biographies of Stiftamtmadur Olafur Stephensen and Chief Justice Magnus Stephensen, for instance.

(8) Matters of personal significance

The skeleton of the contemporary sections of Arb.Isl. is made up of the most important events in the country as a whole seen in their national context. But much of the extra material, which gives the contemporary sections a slightly different flavour from the previous ones, is concerned with Espolin himself, his family, his immediate environment and the North of Iceland in general.

This parochial element is not very prominent when he deals with the first of his six categories of subject-matter. An investigation of section IX of Arb.Isl. (1770-1804; for most of which period Espolin had written sources) seems to suggest that as far as things having to do with nature and the condition of the people were concerned, Espolin's account was geographically fairly well balanced - with the exception that of the quarters of the country the East got by far the least attention. And Espolin referred rather more often and in more concrete terms to the weather in the North than in other parts of the country. However, as far as possible Espolin tried to generalize about the seasons, but given the geography of Iceland and the country's size this could not always be done: there could be a good summer in the South while there was a bad one in the North and vice versa, etc. So Espolin often referred to the quarters or individual regions with regard to the weather and farming. He also generalized considerably about fishing, but as the South was the most important part of the country from this point of view it was

naturally mentioned most often in this regard. Epidemic diseases were seldom restricted to individual districts, and famine and death of livestock because of starvation often occurred in the whole country at once. But the remaining items in this section did not lend themselves to generalization. Espolin exhaustively dealt with matters like shipwrecks, people dying by drowning or of exposure, and conflagrations of farm-houses: he dealt with events of this order of importance in distant parts of the country as well as in the North. But, as we will see later, Espolin tended to know more about events of this kind in the North.

As for government and law, Espolin described more criminal cases in Skagafjardarsysla - his own district - and Hunavatnssysla than in any other syslur. As far as Skagafjardarsysla is concerned it seems clear that Espolin thought of the annals as a convenient medium for explaining and justifying his conduct as an official, which had been severely criticized by his superiors. In fact, except in connection with his work as a sheriff, Espolin seldom mentioned himself. There are several references to this in his account of the period 1821-25 which I have chosen at random for detailed investigation: it is evident that the author was sheriff of Skagafjardarsysla.[34] Hunavatnssysla was going through an age of upheaval, and more criminal offences were committed there than in any other region in the country. But it is noteworthy that Espolin had some first-hand knowledge of some of the most infamous characters living there.[34]

The contemporary section of Arb.Isl. is studded with references to Espolin's family.[35] This was partly so, of course, because many of his relatives held important positions in Iceland, but one feels that the descriptions of those whom Espolin was well acquainted with personally are different in tone from the descriptions of those whom he knew only vaguely or not at all. It is very interesting to investigate what Espolin said about Olafur Stefansson, Magnus Stephensen and Stefan Thorarinsson. He knew Stefan, his half-brother, and Magnus very well, but he resented the former's criticism of his work as an official and disliked the latter's Weltanschauung, which clashed so severely with his own. Espolin's feelings towards these men were obviously mixed, but he seems to provide the reader with a balanced picture of them, drawn with honesty and frankness.

An investigation of the period 1821-25 shows how strong the particularly "northern" element is.[36] To mention a few specific examples, taken from the whole period under survey, it is no coincidence that all the ship-wrecks which are described in detail took place in Eyjafjardarsysla, Skagafjardarsysla, and Hunavatnssysla[37] and that a whole chapter is devoted to the death of Parson Oddur at Miklibaer[38] and to the farmer Thorlakur Hallgrimsson, who was from Eyjafjardarsysla, like Espolin himself.[39]

As we have seen, Espolin's personal interests were reflected in his treatment of cultural matters, for instance, and his enthusiasm about heroic deeds and feats of strength was expressed in an even more obvious manner in Arb.Isl. We get the impression

that if somebody he dealt with was endowed with great physical strength Espolin seldom failed to mention it. He was inclined to make comments like "Thorsteinn .... was the strongest young man people knew of in the country".[40]

REFERENCES

1 Arb.Isl. XI, p.68 "...verda enn af ohaegdir ad greina sumt hedan af."

2 ibid. p.19

3 ibid. p.40

4 Arb.Isl. XII, p.22

5 Sg.J.E. p.48f.

6 Arb.Isl. XII, pp.27-42

7 Arb.Isl. XI, p.99ff

8 Arb.Isl. XII, p.124

9 ibid. p.139

10 Arb.Isl. XI, p.26

11 ibid. p.124

12 Arb.Isl. XII, p.157

13 See, for instance, ibid. p.99, p.159, p.161 p.184f

14 ibid. p.24

15 ibid. p.123

16 ibid. p.130

17 ibid. p.127

18 ibid. p.149

19 ibid. p.58

20 See, for instance, Arb.Isl. XI, p.76, p.84, p.98

21 ibid. p.112

22 Arb.Isl. XII, p.50

23 ibid. p.127, p.128f, p.146, p.151

24 ibid. p.146 "... toku nokkrir theim vel ... en margir sinntu litt, sem jafnan er, og nokkrir logdu all-misjafnt til, er tho thottust vitrir."

25 ibid. p.127 "Thad var laerd bok og vel stilud, en sumum thotti nokkud smakka af Pelagiana laerdomi eda motfalla heldur ad tilhneigingar manna vaeri spilltar."

26 ibid. p.145ff, p.151

27 Arb.Isl. XI, p.111f

28 Arb.Isl. XII, p.179ff

29 ibid. p.136

30 ibid. p.135

31 Arb.Isl. XI, p.8, p.9, p.10, p.31

32 ibid. pp.130-33

33 Arb.Isl. XII, p.130, p.145, p.150, p.151, p.152, p.153

34 ibid. p.122, p.143, p.150

35 As for the period 1821-5 see ibid. p.120f, p.135, p.142, p.154f, p.147

36 In addition to references to Espolin himself and his family see, for instance, ibid. p.127, p.131f, p.144, p.146

37 Arb.Isl. XI, p.38, p.83; Arb.Isl. XII, p.121f, p.172

38 Arb.Isl. XI, p.51

39 Arb.Isl. XII, p.131f

40 ibid. p.82

CHAPTER 7

ESPOLIN ON NON-CONTEMPORARY WORLD HISTORY

Introductory remarks

Espolin's numerous works on world history are of immense length. None of them was based on research into primary sources; some were direct translations from Danish, some were adaptations such as Kkjs.A and B and Danak.s. the bulk of which was based on Ludvig Holberg's work, others were extracts, and in some cases a synthesis of various sources can be spoken of. There is, however, a considerable personal element in these works - the odd comments and whole chapters devoted to analysis. It is this element that I have tried to look out for when reading or skimming through the works.

(1) Some general comments: descriptions of individual nations

The works covered in this chapter deal mainly with warfare, government, the lives of kings and other prominent individuals and the history of the church. Espolin's main preconceptions were a basically sympathetic view of antiquity and, as far as his dislike of superstition allowed, of the modern period, a negative attitude towards the Middle Ages and the Roman Catholic Church, a strict view of morality, law and order, and dislike of the nobility. A preference for the monarchy as a form of government is not very much in evidence. Generally speaking, this is the same line of thought as runs through Espolin's writings on Icelandic history.

There is, however, one aspect of his thought that is

evident only in his writings on world history. This is his characterization of individual nations, in which his interest in anthropology and his flair for comparative history are evident. He usually followed the same pattern of description: physical appearance - character traits - abilities and attitudes in war. As an Icelander he obviously felt an affinity with the Nordic peoples, which he described in favourable terms, and perhaps also to a lesser extent with other West European nations. It seems as if he rather looked down on other nations and races, with the possible exemption of the Persians, who were traditionally regarded by the Europeans as a civilized nation.

At the outset of Nord.s.[1] Espolin dealt with the five main peoples in Europe in the past among which were the Jutes and the Goths, the ancestors of the Scandinavians, and the Germans. He said of these peoples that they were tall and strong and produced excellent soldiers, but somewhat over-zealous. The Scandinavian peoples were rather more intelligent, but claimed not to be less brave. Even though Espolin was generally speaking well disposed towards the Romans (see below) he argued that Roman influences on the Teutonic peoples were negative. They adopted vices from the Romans - such as eccentricity, competitive spirit (perhaps he is here referring to the ambitions of the Roman generals), and superstition - but not their learning. Antiquity was a splendid (glaest) period in German history; the Germans of that time were heroes (afreksmenn).[1b] The Scandinavian kings were superior to the late Romans in courage, gentlemanliness (drengskapur), and

leniency.[2] The same romantic attitude towards the old Scandinavians is seen in Espolin's account of the Age of the Vikings (see below).

In Espolin's opinion, the Celtic peoples, "the migrant nations", i.e. those of the Barbarian Migrations, the British, and the Scandinavians had several things in common. Their sidir (manners, morals) were similar; they all loved warfare and liberty; there were common traits in government and in their law of inheritance.

When dealing with later periods Espolin apparently did not make any descriptions of the individual Scandinavian peoples. With regard to the eventful course of Danish-Swedish relations one might have expected to find an anti-Swedish bias, but this is not the case except perhaps in the account of the late medieval period when the Swedes' discontent with Queen Margaret's rule was referred to [3] and Engelbrekt Engelbrektsson's usurpation was spoken of,[4] for instance. Certainly this element is not found in the account of the post-Reformation period when the major Danish-Swedish conflicts took place.

The French had various definite characteristics. They were shallow minded in political affairs, fickle, and superstitious even though they have been regarded as courteous and as brave soldiers.[5] Some of the same elements were found in the Spaniards in the High Middle Ages: they were very superstitious, but by no means lacking in bravery and gentlemanliness.[6]

The descriptions of the nations and races that Espolin

knew less about were very much cast in a stereotyped mould. The Slavonic peoples were said to be hardy and brave but not very civilized; they were tall, strong, and indefatigable, jolly, hospitable, and impulsive; their language was said to be the most clumsy of all the European languages and the least significant.[7] In a fairly extensive description of the Persians in Persakonungatal (IB.162,4to.)[8] a conventional comparison of their character and manners (especially of the people in North Persia) is made with the French; reportedly, the common people looked like the Icelanders. Espolin said that many of the Persians were of good stature, they were fairly strong, ambitious and generous, hygienic, well-mannered, jovial, and careful about the upbringing of their children, but given to luxury - their epicurism was one of the factors that caused their decline in Antiquity[9] - (Persakonungatal) and very lax with regard to morals. They can be cruel and are good fighters. Espolin did not hesitate to make a detailed comparison between the Persians and the Turks. The Persians were more civilized, but the Turks were the better fighters and superior in gentlemanliness and personal integrity. The Gypsies were described as great archers who possess an immense number of horses; they drink mare's milk and eat raw horse meat, grown tender from being kept under their saddles; they are the ugliest of all nations, their eyes wide-set but their noses very small; they are the most heavily built and strongest of all nations, cruel and hard-hearted towards their enemies, but magnanimous towards their friends; they always keep their word.[9a]

The description of the Mongols is on the same lines: there is no sign of the fascination which many eighteenth century Europeans had for the Chinese. "... It applies to all the Mongol nations that they are of small stature and heavily built, broad-faced and black-haired, their noses small; they are wily and cunning, but not courageous, shrewd and hardy, they are not brave fighters, but cruel; they can bear torture better than other people; many of them are moral." However, their capacity for making inventions was praised.[10]

(2) Antiquity

Espolin's approach to pre-Hellenic ancient times was determined by his firm belief in the contents and the chronological framework of the Bible (Old Testament). The world was created 3976 B.C.[11] It is thought, he said, that all the Mongolid nations were descended from Ham, the son of Noah, and the ancient Egypts from Mizraim, the son of Ham.[12] Espolin traced the history of the Persians back to the Deluge and saw the origins of the Scandinavians in Biblical terms in Nok.kon.cor. However, when Espolin spoke of the five main races or peoples in Europe in Nord.s.[13] he did so without reference to the Bible.

Most of Espolin's work on antiquity dealt with the Romans. In a survey of their manners and character in Sgn.fo.No.,[14] inserted at about 150 B.C., he described them very favourably, but added that their morals declined later. The virtues of the Romans were magnanimity - which later disappeared - stability, fortitude, and bravery; their penal laws were praiseworthy. Espolin was very

impressed by the Romans' acceptance of their laws - here one is reminded of his attitude towards crime and punishment in contemporary Iceland - which he regarded as the reason why the power of the dictators was not abused for a long period.[15]

The judgements Espolin passed on some of the most important figures in Roman history do not form a definite pattern except perhaps in so far as he, in accordance with his ethical ideal, tended to be favourably disposed towards those men he saw as moral and having personal integrity. This can be seen from a very generalized survey of Espolin's attitude towards certain individuals, stating whether it was basically positive or negative. He was basically positive towards the Gracchi,[16] Sulla,[17] Spartacus,[18] Caesar,[19] Augustus,[20] Hadrian,[21] Marcus Aurelius,[22] Quintillus,[23] Diocletian,[24] Julian the Apostate,[25] and Theodosius;[26] basically negative towards Marius,[27] Crassus,[28] Catilina,[29] Tiberius,[30] Claudius,31 Nero,[32] Antonius Pius,[33] the emperors following Marcus Aurelius, and Galerius.[34] It is remarkable, in view of Espolin's sets of beliefs, that he spoke well of Spartacus, the rebel against the Establishment - perhaps he saw Spartacus as a brave and athletic man and may have identified with him as such. Furthermore, he praised Julian the Apostate in many ways in spite of his religious policy. Julian, Espolin claims,was second only to Caesar in overall ability; his virtues were many and his paganism was his only fault. In fact Espolin did not always speak in a derogatory way of pagan beliefs as can be seen from his description of Stoicism, "the best of all heathen

teachings".[35] Its influence was salutary; Espolin was only critical of its acceptance of suicide.

Espolin saw the third and fourth centuries A.D. as a momentous period in the history of mankind. In the preface to Sgr.foNo.I,ii he suggested that this period, roughly, was the worst since the Deluge and that there was no possibility that anything so bad would occur again. A similar attitude is evident in the account of the year 235.[36] Indeed Espolin was deeply concerned with trying to explain the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Had the Romans kept the customs of their ancestors their Empire would not havefallen. As it was, it was no wonder that the Romans were defeated by the barbarians. The government was weak, the army lacking in discipline, the taxation in the provinces was too heavy. Domestic disputes were rampant as was unfaithfulness (<u>otruleiki</u>). This did in fact more harm to the Romans than their pagan beliefs. It did not improve matters that the legislation of the time was unsuccessful.[37] This analysis reflects very well Espolin's basically favourable view of the Roman Republic and the early Empire.

One of the reasons why Espolin took so much interest in the period of the late Roman Empire was that he considered it of fundamental importance for the development of Christianity. This was an essential element in his orthodox Lutheran view of church history, which can be summarized as follows. The Christian dogma was at the beginning pure and valid, but in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages it became mixed with monkish superstition

and dubious doctrines, which contributed to the intellectual darkness that remained throughout the Middle Ages. With the Reformation, in the countries that adopted Protestantism, religion recovered - went back to its original purity, the correct interpretation of the scriptures, etc., while the Roman Catholics persisted in their "heresy" and committed many wicked acts.

Espolin saw this fateful decline of Christianity against a social and cultural background. In the preface to Sgr.fo.No. I,ii he traces the origin of papal power to the Christians' unreasonable fondness for relics and the encroachment of foreign, unwise and ignorant nations in the part of the world where there had been learning previously. For this reason hardly any learned men were found after the day of Leo I.[38] This cultural decline manifested itself in false theories (rangt alit), eccentricities and superstitious beliefs[39] - here he probably means veneration of saints and indiscriminate belief in miracles and perhaps the theories of St. Augustine - as well as in an increase in trickery and cunning.[40] With the advent of Christianity the customs of the common people became more moderate and many evils which accompanied paganism were uprooted;[41] however, the decline was not stopped and came to affect Christianity in time. Espolin discussed the evolution of various new dogmas, e.g. the belief in the Trinity[42] and in purgatory;[43] he believed in the Trinity himself, but generally he seems to have thought of dogmatism as an unfortunate element in Christianity and did not regard himself as a dogmatist (see the preface to Kkjs.B). However, he did not

condemn all those who were later branded as heretics; he said , for instance, that Origen's teachings had been very beneficial to the development of Christianity.[44]

A negative development also took place in monasticism, in Espolin's opinion. At first monks were "good and holy men", who had sought refuge from persecution, but they became useless to society, disputatious and domineering, and their numbers grew excessively.[45]

(3) The Middle Ages

In Espolin's view the Middle Ages were characterised by a continuation of the trends referred to above, of excessive power of the papacy, excessive emphasis on irrational beliefs, "misguidance" of the Christian faith to which the influence of Aristotelian theories contributed, superstition and intellectual eclipse caused by the clergy's monopoly of learning, barbarism, and worship of military matters. However, Espolin did not regard the Middle Ages as static; it is easy to see from his analytical chapters that he realised that important changes took place during the medieval period.

When dealing with the Merovingian period Espolin explained how the power of the kings increased, and then discussed the development of Christianity. Monasticism was thought to be both easy and profitable and this had many undesirable consequences. The prevalent ignorance was caused by the clergy's abuse of their monopoly of literacy; Christianity was too dogmatic.[47] The same note was struck in the description of the Carolingian period.[48]

It was characterized by ignorance; the Saracens in Spain were the only knowledgeable people in the western countries. The clergy were careful not to educate the public and made "everything look mysterious". In particular, they assumed great power over the institution of marriage. They were always referring to Christian dogma; as a result, hypocrisy and superstition increased everywhere; instead of true virtue, "self-proclaimed sancity" was most sought after and most respected. Only those from whom the clergy could gain anything were allowed to go to confession. But the clergy themselves indulged in bad habits of all kinds. The landowners became very powerful. The common people were grossly oppressed by the clergy and rikismenn (meaning, in this context, powerful men, presumably the nobility). The rikismenn became too concerned with the code of chivalry; they concerned themselves only with displaying bravery, because of arrogance rather than for any utilatarian purposes. In these days people were foolhardy and "did not restrain their valour". Military discipline was lacking; nothing was known of the customs of the ancient Greeks and Romans, who waged war wisely. This comment clearly reveals Espolin's basic pro-classical and anti-medieval bias. Everybody thought that the end of the world was near; while monasticism flourished good morals were neglected. Ignorance and clerical power increased throughout the tenth century; it did not occur to anybody that this was not right. The same estimate of the tenth century can be found under the year 996.[49] Bad times (oold) in France in the eleventh century were

caused by the institution of pax Dei and the power of the clergy in general as well as by anarchy and discord among the powerful men.[50]

Under the year 873 Espolin explained the rise of papal power. This was mostly due to the internal discord among the French and various other French national characteristics, which have been referred to above.[51]

Espolin's admiration of the bravery of the Vikings is obvious; this was clearly connected with his belief in the exceptional physical prowess of the Northerners. To him the question was not why the Vikings achieved what they did achieve, but why they did not achieve more. "The Danes and the Norwegians were a most terrible nation." Had they been as disciplined as the Romans they would have defeated all nations because of their valour. Since the days of the Romans there was no nation that could hold its own against the Norsemen if their respective forces were equally strong and even if the opponents of the Norsemen had some numerical advantage.[52] But as we have seen above, Espolin did not glorify war; indeed in his history of the Vikings he pointed out the connection between the perpetual warfare in the eighth century and the eclipse of historical scholarship.

In the history of the Swabian emperors (under 1199) in Nord.s. there is a chapter on the spirit of the age.[53] Espolin saw the emergence of towns as significant, which meant that some people were liberated from the oppression of the nobility and that the power of the king increased - a development which the Church

fiercely opposed. People began to regard handicrafts and trade as respectable occupations. Increased liberty was accompanied by some change, even though it was not absolute, in the intellectual atmosphere: the Church was still a negative influence - the Christian religion was made much more complex then before by the influence of Aristotle's teachings - and superstition was still prevalent. "Generally speaking, morals were than like this: general foolishness, unwise emphasis on bravery, arrogance connected with tournaments, too much credulity, almost no decency, no effective check on disturbances; the barbarians were then more prudent than most Europeans."

Writing about "novelties" (nyjungar) in the late fifteenth century,[54] Espolin regarded the disappearance of some medieval elements as a positive factor, but despite his love of learning he was critical of the influence of the Renaissance. He mentioned the changes that took place in the art of war, stressing that the importance of chivalry declined and therewith the idolization of physical prowess. There was improvement in government, but this was accompanied by fraud and deceit; Espolin stressed the increase in violation of oaths, assassinations and other vices. The rulers of Europe were influenced in this respect by the popes and the Italians; Louis XI and Emperor Ferdinand led the way. Espolin saw an element of pedantry in humanism - "more emphasis was placed on the words than on the culture" - and he mentioned that the obsession with the classical languages led to neglect of the vernaculars. Finally, "the spirit of liberty" (it is not

clear whether this refers to political or religious liberty) was still non-existent. This statement however contradicts what he said in the history of the Emperors of Lytzelborg,[55] a chapter that includes material on social history and inventions. There he stated that people had begun to think in a freer way; an opinion which was expressed, with regard to the fifteenth century, in Thjodv.s.[56]

The most complete survey dealing with the pre-Reformation period is a panoramic description of the state of Sweden at the end of the Kalmar Union.[57] While specifically dealing with one country, the same elements as in the general surveys are found here, such as remarks on osidir (bad manners, bad morals), selfish attitudes, and the imperiousness (rikilaeti) of the nobility. Then Espolin went on to describe mining, farming, external trade, religion and learning. He saw the period of the Kalmar Union as an unhappy one in the history of Sweden.

Espolin traced the origins of the Reformation back to the foundation of the Hanseatic League - with the implication that political changes in the late Middle Ages were very important for the development of religion, even though relations between church and state were not mentioned in this connection. The theory and practice of the Waldenses, Wyclif, and the Hussites were important milestones on the road to Reformation.[58] Another factor which paved the way for the Reformation was the foundation of universities in Germany and other countries and the emergence of learned men in Germany.[59] Apparently Espolin thought that the

Reformation had been inevitable and that it was delayed because people were not sceptical enough in the fifteenth century.[60]

Apart from the analytical chapters, Espolin frequently made value judgements of individuals, mainly kings and emperors, in the Middle Ages. All Espolin's descriptions of people were influenced by an Icelandic tradition which goes back to the Sagas. Physical appearance is described succinctly as well as character and intellectual abilities; in the case of rulers particular attention is of course paid to their methods of government.

The various aspects of Charlemagne's rule were described, for instance, and then Espolin went on to say that it was obvious from the truthful accounts of him that he was a great man, but what monks and ignorant men praise him for most, his religious mission, is least to his credit.[61] To take other examples, Edward I was referred to as having been sly and tyrannical and an outstanding soldier;[62] Richard III was described as a most wicked[63] and Philip Augustus as an excellent man, firm (stadlyndur) and very brave.[64] The description of Emperor Maximilian is typical and clearly shows the influence of the Sagas: "... he was a brave leader (hofdingi), generous, religious, and loved knowledge, a great humanist; he was gay and somewhat eccentric, an energetic hunter and climbed very well when he hunted ibex; he was well built, robust, broad-shouldered and strong, handsome and of noble appearance so he was easily recognizable in a party of hofdingjar".[65]

(4) The Early Modern Period (c.1520-c.1740)

Espolin regarded the Reformation as a gigantic step forward. His admiration of Luther was intense.[66] In one way, however, the "struggle between light and darkness" in the sixteenth century gave more room to superstition, which again contributed to the emergence of sects.[67]

When Espolin surveyed the changes that took place in the century after the Reformation[68] he stressed how extensive these changes were. He high-lighted the advance of learning in a true Enlightenment fashion, mentioning specifically Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes, who dealt a blow to scholasticism. But in some ways learning was associated with petty rivalry and affectation. Italian culture was declining because of the influence of the papacy, but even so the Spanish were much less learned - Don Quixote was the only good book ever written in Spanish. Espolin mentioned belief in magic as a negative feature of the age and the most negative aspect of Protestantism - a statement which invites comparison with what he wrote about Icelandic history; he saw this as a remnant of the Catholic heresy. He pointed out the increase in royal power and the decline in the power of the nobility, even in Roman Catholic countries, and that court life had changed. Further examples of Espolin's interest in the art of war are seen. He mentioned the importance of mercenaries; he also said that military organization was similar to that of the Romans except that, because people no longer fought at close quarters, physical prowess was not as relevant in battle as before. The changes dealt with in this survey are also mentioned

in Espolin's account in Thjodv.s. of the spirit of the age in Ferdinand II's day. There he also referred to the growth of painting and the increased freedom of the peasantry.[69]

In his survey under the year 1748, referred to in Chapter 8, Espolin argued that during the previous century major changes took place only in a few fields.[70] However, in Svias. there is a discussion of power politics in the mid-seventeenth century where comparisons are made with earlier and later periods.[71] In his own day the outside world did not turn a blind eye to the conquest of one nation by another. International relations (in the widest sense) were different in the seventeenth century, there was not so much trade between countries and a nation seldom had rights (itok) in other countries. At that time people knew little of the inhabitants of distant lands; but since then their knowledge had increased. Here Espolin was obviously concerned with the enlightenment of the people.

There are various chapters in Svias. (see Chapter 4) where the political situation, the economy, society, and culture at various times from the days of Gustavus Vasa to the early eighteenth century are analyzed. Among the outstanding features here are Espolin's opinion that the power of the aristocracy had been unfortunate for Sweden and his disapproval of their pomp.[72] He was very much concerned with the progress in learning, in the various branches of the arts and the sciences; among other things his interest in Old Norse studies in Sweden was evident. He also tried to trace religious developments and put forward, for instance,

a balanced estimate of pietism.[73] His treatment of the economy was fairly extensive. He was not concerned merely with good and bad seasons, but referred to the state's finances and how individual branches of the economy - mining industry and fishing as well as farming - had fared in certain periods. He also dealt with the connection between external trade and the country's economy. In so far as any coherent economic thought can be attributed to Espolin, he seems to have had a favourable view of mercantilism and disliked extensive landholding by the nobility. Generally, Espolin gave clear descriptions of the characteristics of individual ages and the way in which they differed from earlier periods.

As usual, Espolin saw historical processes very much in terms of the personalities and actions of individual rulers. His religious ideas obviously influenced his estimates even though the extent of this is not always easy to determine. Hardly anyone was described in more laudatory terms than Gustavus Adolphus, the hero of the Protestant North.[74] Just about everything was good about him; he was thought to have been the best of Swedish kings; his reign was the Golden Age of Sweden. But perhaps Espolin was impressed most of all with his military abilities: "He has been described as superior to most generals; he is most often compared with Scipio Africanus of the ancients, but he (i.e. Gustavus) was superior in that he was a good Christian".[75] The piety, excessive in some people's view, of Christian VI, was mentioned as one of his virtues.[76] Religion must have influenced Espolin's negative opinion of Mary Tudor[77] and his positive estimate of Queen

Elizabeth I.[78] He stated that many people say that the execution of Mary Stuart had been a necessity; Elizabeth's method (adferd) has been attacked by many, but even her enemies have called her a most remarkable person.

Not surprisingly, Espolin's remarks about Queen Christina of Sweden, the Catholic renegade, were very hostile.[79] This is not to say that Espolin always described Catholic monarchs very unfavourably. He even did not take a wholly uncharitable view of James II of England, the staunch opponent of Protestantism - he was gifted in many ways, but his imperiousness and his excessive zeal for Roman Catholicism had serious consequences for him.[80]

Espolin's estimates of individual figures often fit in with the tradition of European historiography. He spoke in a very disapproving way of Ivan the Terrible and Cromwell, for instance. In the case of the latter he took a typical monarchist's attitude, even though he did not approach Cromwell explicitly from that angle; his hypocrisy, craft and false pretence of humility were referred to[81] as well as his wisdom and penetrating mind. Then Espolin implied that he doubted Cromwell's piety; in any case, he probably did not like his religion. Christian IV was labelled as a great king, the one who had achieved most of all the Oldenburg kings, excellent in every way like Gustavus Adolphus. This is in accordance with the tradition of Danish historiography; despite their eventual lack of success under him the Danes have been inclined to regard him as their greatest king.[82]

The qualities Espolin approved in a ruler (see the discussion

of his ethical ideal in Chapter 4) were to a certain extent those associated with enlightened despotism; it could be argued that there was a connection here. In any case it is easy to see how Espolin's political and social thought comes through in most of the extensive value judgements he passed on various rulers in this period, including all the Swedish sovereigns and most of the Danish ones. From his various descriptions it is possible to establish his ideal of a monarch. He tended to describe those monarchs favourably who governed firmly and conscientiously, were careful about the finances of the state, worked for the benefit of the subjects, i.e. were concerned with their security and material welfare, were prudent in the execution of state policy and were men of personal integrity. Contrary traits were faults in monarchs. Love of learning, generosity and physical prowess were positive attributes. Consequently, Espolin's favourite monarchs included Gustavus Adolphus and Christian IV, Peter the Great, Charles IX and Charles XI of Sweden. Peter was a mixture of excellent talent and grave faults, but the former much outweighed the latter. He was incomparable; the mark he left on Russia will be seen as long as the world lasts. Typically Espolin emphasized that he had civilized the Russians.[83] The two Charleses were praised basically for being very effective kings without at the same time being too adventurous.[84] Even though Charles X was a man of many virtues and a good king in some ways he was not careful enough.[85] However, Charles XII was much worse in that respect; even though Espolin was basically

sympathetic towards him as a man and admired him somewhat, he argued that in the last analysis Charles's faults outweighed his good qualities. In a sharper psychological analysis than is usual in Espolin's works, he described the effect of Charles's upbringing, e.g. his being praised and told a great deal about the deeds of his ancestors but not much about the condition of his country, on the formation of the character traits such as excessive zeal, which in Espolin's opinion contributed to his downfall.[86] The upbringing of Charles XI was also dealt with in some detail;[87] perhaps Espolin was particularly conscious of the formative experiences of youth because of his own life.

In Christian VI's case - he was another monarch about whom Espolin had many positive things to say - the great fault was his extravagance; also that he reversed the agrarian policy of his father, with whom he did not stand comparison in most ways.[88] Even though Henry VIII of England was an effective king in Espolin's opinion his dubious morality, eccentricity and fickleness made the overall judgement of him less than favourable.[89]

REFERENCES

1 Nord.s.

1a Thjodv.s. p.669

2 ibid.p.48

3 Svias. p.127

4 ibid. p.133

5 Nord.s. p.183

6 ibid. p.302

7 ibid. p.2f. See also p.81

8 Persakonungatal, p.41

9 ibid.

9a Nord,s. p.323

10 Fra Kinabuum, Chapter 1. "En svo er Mongolathjodum ollum varid, ad thaer eru lagvaxnar og threknar, breidleitar og neflitlar og svarthaerdar, lymskar og undirforular en ekki hugprudar, klokar og hagar, odjarfar i orustu en grimmlyndar i thraut og thola meiri pyndingar en adrir menn, margir sidlatir."

11 Timatalsregistur; Nok.kon.cor.

12 Fra Kinabuum, Chapter 1

13 Nord.s. p.2f

14 Sgr.fo.No. I,i, p.200ff

15 ibid. p.54

16 ibid. p.207

17 ibid. p.244

18 ibid. p.248

19 ibid. p.293

20 Sgr.fo.No. I,ii, Chapter 24

21 ibid. section xiv

22 ibid. p.121f

23 ibid. p.184

24 ibid. p.206

25 ibid. p.248ff

26 ibid. section xx

27 Sgr.fo.No. I,i, p.213f

28 ibid. p.250

29 ibid. p.262

30 Sgr.fo.No.I,ii, p.39

31 ibid. p.53

32 ibid. p.76

33 ibid. p.109

34 ibid. p.206

35 ibid. p.120

36 ibid. p.154

37 Nord.s. p.48. See also loc.cit.

38 ibid. p.47

39 Sgr.fo.No.II,i, section xvii, Chapter xlix

40 ibid. p.255

41 loc.cit.

42 ibid. p.206

43 ibid. p.296

44 ibid. p.170

45 ibid. p.291

47 Sgr.fo.No. Chapter xxvii

48 Nord.s., Karlunga saga, Chapter xl: Fra aldar sidum

49 ibid. p.227

50 ibid. p.238, p.247

51 ibid. p.183

52 ibid. p.177. "Danir og Nordmenn voru hin ogur-
legasta thjod."

53 Sgr.fo.No.II,ii, p.60. "Sidir voru tha mjog a thann hatt: almenn heimska, oviturlig ofurkappshreysti, burtreidayfirlaeti, trugirni of mikil, sidsemi alls engin ad kalla og engin god skipan ad hemja ospektir; svo ad villithjodir voru tha hyggnari en Norduralfubuar flestir."

54 Nord.s. p.459f

55 Sgr.fo.No.II,ii, p.219ff

56 Thjodv.s. p.669ff

57 Svias. p.244f

58 Thjodv.s. p.669ff (pt.ii, ch.i)

59 ibid. p.741ff.

60 ibid. p.669ff

61 Nord.s. p.151. See also Chapter 4.

62 ibid. p.360

63 ibid. p.453

64 ibid. p.299

65 ibid. p.456. "...hann var vel hugadur hofdingi, or af fe, truraekinn og namgjarn, fornfraedamadur mikill; hann var katur og nokkud serlegur i skapi, keppinn vid veidar og allra manna brattgengastur, er hann for a steingeitaveidi; hann var vel i vexti, threkinn og herdamikill og vel styrkur, fridur sinum og gofuglegur, svo hann var audkonndur ur flokki flestra hofdingja."

66 See, for instance, ibid. p.493

67 Endurskirarathattur i IB. 19, 4to. p.201

68 Nord.s. p.560f

69 Thjodv.s., p.1133

70 Nord.s., p.612

71 Svias. p.439

72 See especially Svias. p.426, p.337; see also above.

73 Svias. pp.606-9

74 See, for instance, Svias. p.346f, p.392ff; Nord.s. p.546. It is noteworthy that after the Finnish writer Zacharias Topelius's novel, The Tales of the Army Surgeon, in which Gustavus Adolphus figures prominently, was translated into Icelandic about 1900, the popularity of the name Gustaf increased greatly in Iceland.

75 Svias. p.392. "Hefur verid kalladur flestum herstjorum aedri; af fornum herstjorum helzt likt vid Scipio Africanus, bar hann thad tho yfir, ad hann var vel kristinn."

76 Danak.s. (IBR.2,fol.) p.508

77 Nord.s. p.503

78 ibid. p.520

79 Svias. p.424f

80 Nord.s. p.580

81 ibid. p.557, p.563; Danak.s. (IBR.2,fol) p.448

82 Danak.s. (IBR.2,fol) p.437

83 Sgr.Pe.cz. p.334f

84 Svias. p.337f, pp.514-7, p.528

85 ibid. p.457

86 See,for instance, Svias. p.528ff

87 Svias. p.486

88 Danak.s. (IB.152,4to.) p.958

89 Nord.s. p.495

CHAPTER 8

ESPOLIN ON CONTEMPORARY WORLD HISTORY

Introductory remarks

"Contemporary" is a flexible term, and it is a matter of opinion how far back we should take "contemporary history" in Espolin's case. I have chosen to begin this survey in the mid eighteenth century, about twenty years before Espolin was born, in order to enable me to consider Espolin's opinion of the Enlightenment in one place. The survey goes right down to the year in which Espolin died, 1836, when he finished Kkjs.B, probably the last work he wrote.

The writings by Espolin with which this chapter is chiefly concerned include Ken.Sagn. (the relevant appendix covers world history 1793-1800), Kkjs.B, Thjodv.s., Danak.s., Nord.s., (which is a part of Sgr.fo.No.), Svias., Annall 1769-1836, and Minnisbok. These works are written in the period 1800-1836, and one of the themes of this paper will be an examination of the change in Espolin's attitudes during that time.

In this paper I have chosen to concentrate on certain aspects of Espolin's estimation of contemporary and near-contemporary world history. I have tried to choose my themes in such a way that Espolin's view of the developments of the period can be seen in a nutshell. I have tried to be analytical and to keep the factual material to a minimum, for instance by integrating material on individual countries as far as possible in the

more general sections, but some overlapping was inevitable, both between the more general and the more specific sections and between two related general themes such as the Enlightenment and religion. I have tried to keep the number of themes as small as possible, but at the same time I bore in mind that the subject could only be made manageable by breaking it up into several categories.

(1) The Enlightenment

When I refer to the Enlightenment I see it as a mainly eighteenth century intellectual movement characterized by emphasis on reason, the idea of universal progress, and disrespect for authority and tradition. What exactly Espolin understood by the term is difficult to establish.

In Espolin's works there are not many direct references to "the Enlightenment".[1] However, in Kkjs.B he mentions uppklarunaranda (the spirit of Enlightenment - upplysing is the usual Icelandic term)[2] as well as the ljos upplysingar (literally: the light of Enlightenment).[3] In the preface to Ken.Sagn. he speaks of "the enlightenment of the country" (see Chapter 4). On no occasion does Espolin discuss the Enlightenment as such as an intellectual movement, but it is possible to string together a coherent picture of his view of it by looking at various quotations. In Kkjs.B and Nord.s. Espolin described what he saw as the positive and negative aspects of the intellectual developments of the eighteenth century.

Espolin seems to have approved of most aspects of the Enlightenment, but there are exceptions; most noticeably the attitude towards religion, be it represented in Deism, extreme

religious rationalism or atheism. In Nord.s. (which was written in 1800) Espolin said that epicurism and what he called "excessive zeal for independence" (frekja sjalfraedis) was on the increase; this he used to illustrate his generalisation that there is nothing so good in the world that it does not have a negative aspect. Both in Nord.s. and Kkjs.B Espolin enumerates the positive aspects. He mentions that the first half of the eighteenth century was called the Age of Unity because religious disputes became less prominent and tolerance increased. Warfare became less ferocious, learning increased and oppression by powerful men and the clergy diminished. As an example Espolin took the decline of slavery in the Western Hemisphere.[4] In Nord.s. he said that religious freedom, the application of reason and consequently compassion increased among all nations; also the Turks (sic).[5] Espolin's attitude towards the Enlightenment seems generally speaking to have been more favourable when he wrote Nord.s. than when he wrote Kkjs.B: his views on the subject obviously changed in the thirty-odd years that passed between the writing of the two works. An examination of the works of contemporary history he wrote in the interval bears out this statement.

At least when he was a young man Espolin had something positive to say about the monarchs associated with the Enlightenment some of whom are known in history as enlightened despots.

In some ways Frederick the Great was described favourably; Espolin admired his talent as a soldier[6] and said that he was

thought to be the most remarkable of all kings with regard to wisdom, achievement and justice; he consequently had had no equal.[7] No doubt Espolin liked Frederick's habit of spending part of the day reading and talking with wise men but the king, he thought, was too fond of his nobles.[8] (This statement is of course in accordance with Espolin's general stand against the nobility.) In this chapter, presumably written in 1820 or just after, Espolin stressed Frederick's tolerance; even though Frederick disliked the clergy he did not want the Christian religion to be derided (sic). However in Kkjs.B a more critical attitude is taken towards this aspect of Frederick's character and policies. It is mentioned that unbelief gained the upper hand in Germany during Frederick's reign[9] and the king's influence on religious developments in Europe is seen as unfortunate.

If Espolin's attitude towards Frederick the Great was somewhat ambivalent his attitude towards Joseph II was definitely positive even though this ruler was a Roman Catholic. Espolin stresses the Emperor's wisdom and the establishment of religious liberty in his hereditary domains.[10] Joseph's attempts to uproot superstition from among the common people in the Austrian Netherlands are also mentioned with implied approval. Espolin also saw Gustavus III of Sweden in a favourable light; he says, to be sure, that he does not know much about Swedish history after about 1770,[10a] but his attitude is clear. As Gustavus was, in Espolin's estimation, a wise and talented man, with oratorical gifts and impressive physical appearance,[11] hardy and brave,[12] his

image must have appealed to Espolin. Gustavus was a good king[13] even though the war of 1788 was an act of rashness.[14] Espolin emphasises Gustavus's humanitarianism[15] and says that there were respectable motives behind his desire to increase his own power.[16] His basic difficulty was that he never managed to secure the whole-hearted support of the nobility. There is no doubt that this "enlightened despot" enjoyed Espolin's sympathy. The scant references to Catherine the Great are also favourable; she was very venturesome and determined (harla mikil fyrir ser);[17] and her policies made her realm more prosperous.[18] No Danish monarch can be classified as "enlightened", and as Espolin minimized the role played by the German physician Struensee in Danish politics in the period 1770-72 he did not pass a judgement on Struensee as an enlightened "ruler".[19] However, Espolin deals with one "enlightened" measure taken by the Danish government and its consequences: the temporary abolition of censorship and the subsequent introduction of less rigid censorship laws than had previously existed (see Chapter 1). In Danak.s. (written sometime after 1808) Espolin says that the freedom of the press had been beneficial to Danish culture even though some people had taken advantage of it, e.g. by mocking the Christian religion and publishing libellous works.[20] In Kkjs.B, where Espolin deals with the tougher censorship laws of 1799, his more conservative outlook in old age is evident: even though the effect of the rescript was not in all ways positive, it was needed so that "impudence" (frekja) might be checked.

Those who had most vigorously attacked the government were in fact responsible for the issue of the rescript.[21]

Espolin's attitude towards the philosophes and the culture and learning of the age in general, can be seen, for instance, in a chapter on Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau in Kkjs.B.[22] Espolin refers to L'esprit des lois in a fairly neutral way, saying that it enjoys a high reputation, but then adds that many good things can be found in it. Voltaire is described as a very intelligent (skarpvitur) man, who claimed to be a philosopher and who is regarded as such by many: and Espolin was very impressed by his ability as a poet.[23] Voltaire, Espolin said, over-emphasized the concept of tolerance in his writings, the effect of which was damaging: Voltaire has done more harm than most other men. The unbelief of the age is traced especially to him and Frederick the Great. One of the positive things about Rousseau is said to be that he had prevented excessive veneration of Voltaire. Rousseau is described as the foremost spokesman of the "naturalists", i.e. materialists, very intelligent but somewhat eccentric. He did not realize, Espolin claimed, that the inherent corruption of man is the cause of all his misfortunes. Even though Espolin was not sympathetic towards Rousseau, he praised two of Rousseau's books highly: Le contrat social and Emile.

As well as dealing with individuals Espolin made some generalizations about the philosophes and their impact on the world. He had a tendency to divorce what to him were the negative

aspects of the Enlightenment, unorthodox thought, unbelief, etc., from the positive ones, ignoring the possibility that the latter might not have existed without the former. Espolin says that even though the learning of the Encyclopedists[24] was excellent, their work resulted in increased laxity of thought (thanka-lausraedi), undermined religion and stimulated materialism. In Kkjs.B Espolin emphasized that the philosophes had sown the seeds of the French Revolution: they laid the basis of the disastrous events and gross impiety (til otidar oc ogudleiks thess mikla) which afflicted France later and spread from there to other countries.[25] As will be seen below, Espolin did not make any clear distinction between the impact of the philosophes on religious developments on the one hand and on political developments on the other.

In a chapter in Kkjs.B, Fra barnaupp eldi ("On the upbringing of children"),[26] Espolin attacks the pedagogical theories of the Enlightenment. He says that after the deaths of Ernesti and Lessing (i.e. c.1780), there was disorder (engin regla) in the disciplines of theology and philosophy, and that then new methods of upbringing were introduced. As was the case in so many other fields, the deviation from previous teaching was too great. Espolin argued that it was uncommon for strict upbringing to have bad consequences; despite his own experiences he thought that firm control over children was desirable and necessary. He agreed with N.F.S. Gruntvig, the Danish ecclesiastic and poet (1783-1872), that the worst effect which strict upbringing could

have would be to breed resentment of "correct" discipline and that the emphasis on learning by heart had resulted in trivia being learned. Espolin made a point here which he had previously made in connection with Rousseau (see above), that man was not as good by nature as the enlightened theorists thought. He admits that some of their teachings were fair and reasonable, but he stresses that they neglected the role of conscience.

In Espolin's writings dealing with intellectual history after the end of the classical period of the Enlightenment, usually taken to coincide with the French Revolution, I have come across only two references to "enlightenment". Espolin wrote that Tsar Alexander I of Russia spread enlightenment and true Christianity in his realm.[27] Here the question arises whether Espolin (writing this work in the 1830s) saw the Enlightment as a spent force. As will be seen in the section on religion, there are some indications that he saw the last few decades before 1789 and the post-1789 period alike in terms of a continuous struggle between the forces of morality and those of immorality. But it is always difficult to determine how far Espolin thought in terms of the Enlightenment when he is not dealing directly with religion. In a survey in Thjodv.s.[28] he mentions that the arts and the sciences had flourished in the German speaking countries in Joseph II's period, but does not put these matters into perspective. He mentions progress in education, but links it only with its impact on

religion. Likewise, in the final chapter of the book[29] the antiquarianism of the age is not seen in its wider context.

The same is true of Espolin's references to science and technology. He was obviously amazed at the inventions of the age and aware of their social implications which can for instance be seen from his description of the effect of the Industrial Revolution (not his term) on the condition of the labourer.[30] Moreover, a quantitative idea of progress was not totally alien to him: in connection with the advancement of knowledge, especially the natural sciences, in Joseph II's day he said that it was thought that in forty years the body of knowledge in most fields had doubled.[31]

(2) Religion

As Kkjs.B is the main source for this section the picture constructed will primarily be of Espolin's interpretation of contemporary religious history towards the end of his life. His view of the second half of the eighteenth century is clearly to a certain extent coloured by his interpretation of the early nineteenth century.

Espolin's basic religious ideas have been discussed in Chapter 5. Ecclesiastical history was to him a very important branch of history and he was convinced that only men with the right attitudes and qualifications were capable of writing ecclesiastical history (see Chapter 4).[32] He modestly claims that his account of the first half of the eighteenth century is imperfect and what follows is only fragmentary.

As was to be expected from a man with his outlook, Espolin saw the state of the Christian religion as satisfactory about the middle of the eighteenth century. Religious disputes were on the wane, tolerance increased, Biblical studies flourished, and so did missionary activity. About this time, however, "false philosophy" - the teaching of the Enlightenment thinkers - gained ground with disastrous results in the Protestant countries and in France, but other Roman Catholic countries escaped. The main characteristics of the oold (bad times) in the later eighteenth century were as follows: progress in the arts and the sciences (visindi) turned into unbelief.[33] The Bible was interpreted in an unorthodox way, everything negative it says about the nature of man was challenged, and reason was unduly emphasized. In the long run liberty turned into arrogance, self-denial was no longer practised, morals declined.[34] The "old virtues" as practised among both the Protestants and the Roman Catholics were better. Espolin suggested[35] that the decrease in the power of the pope had been the first sign of one of John's revelations coming true: the Beast from the abyss was emerging. This is a theme which runs through Espolin's account of contemporary church history.

In Espolin's opinion the banner of true Christianity was carried during this difficult period by certain sects: pietists (Espolin himself was the pupil of a parson who can be described as a pietist - see Chapters 1 and 3) and Methodists,[36] Herrenhuters and Anabaptists.[37] The main champion of the forces of tradition

in Denmark was Bishop Balle, who is praised in no uncertain terms; he saved, it is claimed, the Danish church from disaster and his catechism was considered excellent. Espolin's views on the struggle between religious rationalism, represented by Magnus Stephensen and his followers, and orthodoxy are obviously reflected in his comments on religious developments in Denmark.[37a] Espolin mentions that there was no trace of materialism or other "heresy" in the new Danish hymn book except that there was no reference to the Devil in the hymns.

To Espolin, the French Revolution was a milestone in church history. In Nord.s. his comments on it are relatively mild in tone; he only goes as far as to suggest that the abolition of Christianity as the religion of the state was a rash act. He also says that religious liberty was on the increase.[38] But when writing in the 1830s, he had hardly anything positive to say about the French Revolution. It was a scourge (refsivondur) not only for the French, but also for the Pope and the Germans, who had renounced the Bible.[39] Espolin says that the Terror was a punishment carried out on the French because of their persecution of Protestants and Waldenses.[40] Certainly these two statements indicate a belief in divine intervention in human affairs, which otherwise is not much in evidence in Espolin's writings. Religious determinism at another level, i.e. belief in the fulfilment of scriptural prophesy, is seen in his reference to the "Men of Terror" as probably being the beginning of the Beast[41] and subsequent references to the False Prophet and

the Whore. Espolin was thoroughly acquainted with John's Revelation, having translated the book, and he stated that it had occurred to him that John's prophecy was being realized in the above-mentioned pattern of events before he learnt that two men whom he greatly admired, the Danes Balle and Guldberg, had had the same idea.

References of this kind can be understood in the light of the fact that Espolin emphasized, perhaps more than most modern scholars would, the role that the French Revolution played in spreading unbelief and atheism[42] (unbelief spread like "a fire in withered grass" throughout the world).[43] Any religion, Christian or pagan, Espolin said in this connection,[44] is better than a blind belief in human reason.

Espolin was understandably pleased with the increased religious devotion of the Europeans in the early nineteenth century; he stated for instance that the Bible was respected more about 1820 than it had been twenty years earlier.[45] Even so, however, he saw this period as far as religion was concerned essentially as an extension of the Age of Reason. Espolin argued that a "full" church history could not be written earlier than in more than forty years' time, i.e. in the 1870s, by which time mankind and Christendom would probably have finished "washing themselves" properly.[46] Moreover, he refers to the "heedless (andvaralausa), voluptuous, and egotistic Europe" where the word of God is not respected as much as it should be.[47] The same point is made when he says that there was a great deal

of missionary activity in Africa, but Christianity was "getting cooler" in Europe; materialism, even though not very evident, was there as if hidden in the ashes.[48] Espolin seemed to resent the disappearance of the belief that an epidemic could be interpreted as a sign of divine wrath (bending Guds handar)[49] and that monarchs ruled by divine right.[50] Generally speaking, Espolin did not approve of various theological theories that had been put forward and sects that had emerged during the last few years before he wrote.[51] He said that the prophecy of Bengel (this might be the German divine Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752) though I have found no reference to any prophecy by him) about the state of the world, was coming true. This was, for instance, seen in the facts that there was "a source of Anti-Christ" in Prussia (perhaps Espolin was referring to certain sects there) and that the clergy and others in power discouraged any acquisition of spiritual learning among the general public.[52] It seems as if there was only one development in religious life about 1830 that Espolin was pleased with: the decreasing influence of the Pope in France.[53]

(3) The French Revolution and Napoleon

Espolin's political ideas and attitude towards sovereigns, which throw light on his interpretation of contemporary world history, are dealt with in Chapters 5 and 7. His view of the causes of the French Revolution, which he regards as a monumental event, changed somewhat between 1800 and the 1830s. In Nord.s. he stresses the oppression of the prople and the extravagance

of the royal couple.[54] In Kkjs.B, however, he sees two main reasons for the Revolution: first, long-lasting disorder and the oppression which the French claimed (italics mine) to suffer at the hands of the clergy and nobility, and secondly, what Espolin describes as vehemence (aesing) in striving for liberty.[55] He seems to agree with le Harpe's statement that the philosophy of the Encyclopedists had brought about the Revolution.[56] He elaborates on these points[57] saying that at that time it was as if numerous men woke up and became unsettled (oradnir) in many ways, and adds that increased religious liberty had an effect on political developments and that the Americans' success in revolting against the English (sic) stimulated the desire for liberty.

The extreme revolutionaries are plainted black in Nord.s.[58] not to mention Kkjs.B.[59] However, judging from the concluding chapter of Nord.s., about 1800 Espolin did not necessarily regard the French Revolution as an unfortunate event. He says that the French are engaged in great enterprises (hafa mikid fyrir stafni) and that it is uncertain what the result of the practice of liberty will be. He thinks that, just as earlier on, their "bravery" might not last long. It was not likely that they would be subjugated and more likely that a tyrannical monarchy would be re-established, but he suggests, drawing a historical parallel, that the French lacked the equanimity (stadlyndi) of the Romans when the latter rejected the oppression of the monarchy. In Kkjs.B on the other hand Espolin saw nothing positive

about the French Revolution. He spoke of the furor (sic) of liberty associated with it;[60] it stirred people to opposition to monarchy;[61] people were disloyal to their governments even though they were democratic (lydstjornir).[62] Espolin praised Bernstorff for having protected the Danish state from the forces of revolution just as Balle had protected the Danish church (see above).[63]

Although Espolin's attitude towards the French Revolution was negative in his old age, he did not even then think that the intervention of other states in French affairs in the 1790s had been justified.[64] Moreover, while he was in many ways critical of Napoleon at that time[65] and while his hypothesis that the Beast from the Abyss lived in France[66] must have referred to Napoleon, Espolin still spoke of Napoleon's greatness (as opposed to the wickedness (illmennska) of the English).[67] At the same time, it is easy to see, just as has been demonstrated in connection with the French Revolution, that Espolin's attitude towards Napoleon became more critical as time passed. In the appendix to Ken.Sagn., which covers the period 1793-1800, Espolin speaks of Napoleon's memorable victories, heroic deeds and immortal fame; "this great man" returned to France from Egypt to save the liberty of his country and rescued it by his manliness (manndomur) and energy.[68] In Svias. Napoleon is described as the greatest of soldiers; he was sometimes thought to be unjust, not surprisingly in view of the fact that he was fighting and

was victorious over almost all the most powerful kings in Europe. But then Espolin speaks of what he calls Napoleon's encroachment (yfirgangur).[69] That is the title of a chapter in Thjodv.s.,[70] but Espolin also mentioned there the Englishmen's malevolence towards Napoleon and their lampoons about him.[71]

(4) Political history of the early nineteenth century

The main theme of Espolin's description of political events in the early nineteenth century is sympathy for monarchism, which to him was the ideal form of government; even though he did not favour absolute monarchy, he did not think that subjects should have extensive political rights. (See Chapter 5.) It has been seen above that in Espolin's view one of the bad effects of the French Revolution was the contribution it made to undermining monarchy as a form of government. In accordance with this, Espolin was sceptical, to say the least, of the Swedes' treatment of Gustavus IV. Their behaviour was unusual (faheyrt); only posterity could establish the truth about him, whether or not he was really insane and whether it was justified to exclude his children from succession. Certainly it was not to be seen then that the Swedes loved their royal house.[72]

Espolin did not deal with the Restoration at great length, but his account of the revolutionary movements in 1830-31 was coloured by those basic political ideas referred to above.[73] He did not pass any definite value judgement on the events in France in 1830;[74] he merely said that the French obtained the government they wanted and rejected papal power. Nor is much

said about the events in Poland.[75] However Espolin's general observations are clear-cut: the divine right of kings to govern was no longer believed in (see above); most nations were beginning to desire participation in government, i.e. some form of democracy; and disputes and disturbances were caused in many places by their zeal for liberty (frelsiskapp).[76] In Espolin's view these were the most dangerous movements in the world since the period of Terror;[77] it was as if a major revolution lay ahead; in 1836, the year in which he completed Kkjs.B and the last year of his life, he was anxious to know if a prophecy to the effect that something extraordinary would happen in the course of the year was to be realised.[78]

We can learn from Espolin's accounts that he judged the monarchs in this period in his usual way (see Chapter 7); they should be benevolent and pious; Alexander I and Nicholas I of Russia were praised, for instance.[79] One can deduce from these references that Espolin was more favourably disposed towards the Orthodox Church than towards the Roman Catholic Church. Monarchs should not be tyrants, hence the harsh judgement of Miguel of Portugal,[80] which was probably made so severe because of the lip service he paid to democracy and the prominence of the Jesuits in the state. It is difficult to see any pattern in Espolin's attitude towards nationalism as such. He says that the incorporation of Norway into the realm of the Swedish king under the constitution of 1814 went smoothly, and that subsequent developments in Norway were satisfactory; there is no apparent

resentment against the removal of Norway from the Danish monarchy.[81] Norwegian nationalism as such is scarcely discussed, neither is Greek nationalism in connection with the Greek War of Independence. One could not expect to find much material on political history in a brief ecclesiastical history, but at times Espolin was remarkably non-committal, as when he limits himself to describing events in Spain in the 1820s as oold (hard times).[82]

REFERENCES

1 As the Icelanders have always written fewer nouns with capital letters than most other nations, it is sometimes difficult to determine when the word upplysing and related words occur in an Icelandic text from this period, whether it is a reference to enlightenment in general or to the Enlightenment.

2 Kkjs.B. p.1780

3 ibid. p.1804

4 ibid. p.1802ff

5 Nord.s. p.638

6 Kkjs.B. p.1755

7 Thjodv.s. p.1566

8 loc.cit.

9 Kkjs.B. p.1771, p.1778

10 Nord.s. p.615

10a Svias. p.674

11 ibid. p.665f

12 Kkjs.B. p.1772

13 Svias. p.674

14 ibid. p.675

15 ibid. p.665, p.672

16 ibid. p.672ff.

17 Kkjs.B. p.1762

18 Ken.Sagn. p.78

19 Danak.s. (IB. 152, 4to.) p.961

20 ibid. p.962

21 Kkjs.B. p.1800

22 ibid. p.1769f

23 Nord.s. p.612

24 loc.cit.

25 Kkjs.B. p.1785

26 ibid. p.1775f

27 ibid. p.1819

28 Thjodv.s. p.1649

29 ibid. p.1772 (year 1820)

30 Kkjs.B. p.1825

31 Thjodv.s. p.1649

32 Kkjs.B. p.1744

33 See here Thjodvs.s. p.1649

34 Kkjs.B. p.1802ff: The chapter "Atjanda old"

35 ibid. p.1752

36 ibid. p.1793

37 ibid. p.1802

37a See, for instance, ibid. p.1780, p.1788

38 Nord.s. p.617

39 Kkjs.B. p.1784

40 loc.cit.

41 Kkjs.B. p.1787

42 ibid. p.1780, p.1785

43 ibid. p.1780

44 ibid. p.1787

45 Thjodv.s. p.1772

46 Kkjs.B. p.1744

47 ibid. p.1819

48 ibid. p.1825

49 ibid. p.1827

50 ibid. p.1826

51 loc.cit.

52 Kkjs.B. p.1827

53 ibid. p.1826

54 Nord.s. p.615

55 Kkjs.B. p.1780

56 ibid. p.1785

57 ibid. p.1786

58 See, for instance, Nord.s. p.616

59 See, for instance, the chapter "Fra Frankismonnum" (On the French), Kkjs.B. p.1784f

60 Kkjs.B. p.1787

61 ibid. p.1780

62 ibid. p.1787

63 loc.cit.

64 Kkjs.B. p.1780

65 ibid. pp. 1806-11

66 ibid. p.1807; see above

67 ibid. p.1808

68 Ken.Sagn. pp.79-82

69 Svias. p.677

70 Thjodv.s. p.1752

71 ibid. p.1748

72 Svias. p.678

73 Kkjs.B. p.1826ff

74 ibid. p.1826

75 ibid. p.1827

76 loc.cit.

77 ibid. p.1826

78 ibid. p.1827

79 ibid. p.1825

80 ibid. p.1826

81 Svias. p.680

82 Kkjs.B. p.1825

CHAPTER 9

HANNES FINNSSON AND MANNFAEKKUN AF HALLAERUM

Introductory remarks

This chapter is a study of Hannes Finnsson as an historian with reference to one of his works, Mannfaekkun af hallaerum. This, however, was not the only work of Hannes's that can be labelled as historical. First of all, he played an important part in the writing of Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae, which is ascribed solely to his father, Finnur Jonsson, and was in charge of its publication. How great his part in the work actually was is impossible to say as he carefully obliterated every trace of his own contribution.[1] Therefore it is scarcely feasible to discuss Hannes as an historian in terms of that book. But he also wrote a biographical work on the parsons and the archdeacons in the Skalholt diocese since the Reformation (the annual of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag, vol.ii), an essay on the sulphur industry and trade in Iceland in the reign of Frederick II (1559-1588) (ibid.,vol.iv), and a brief treatise (still unpublished) in Latin, which won a prize from Copenhagen University in 1767, on the question "whether it can be regarded as certain that Bishop Arnfast of Arhus killed Christopher I by poisoning the eucharistic wafer". Moreover Hannes wrote on the population of the Skalholt diocese in the period 1770-1795 in the annual of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag - for the most part material that was incorporated in Mannf.hall. - and a second prize-winning essay of his, on the canon law of the Vikverjar (the inhabitants of the Oslo

Fjord area) (1759) may perhaps be regarded as historical in character.

(1) Hannes Finnsson: his life and thought

Hannes Finnsson was born at Reykholt, W Iceland, in 1739, the son of Finnur Jonsson (1704-1789), bishop of Skalholt 1754-1785, and Gudridur Gisladottir. He received the best education available and at the age of sixteen left for Copenhagen where he studied at the university for seven years, gaining the degree of baccalaureus and subsequently a degree in theology in 1763. During these years and the four years that followed he was engaged in several pursuits, e.g. independent research, and for two years acting as supervisor of Ehlerskollegium (college). He was offered the post of translator in the Royal Library in Paris, but declined; he likewise declined an offer of an appointment as mathematics instructor at the court of Sofia Magdalena, the Queen Dowager. This he did only after his father, the bishop, had invited him to go home and become his assistant. This time Hannes stayed at home for three years, from 1767 to 1770. Then he returned to Copenhagen, and for the next seven years he worked there as a writer, a medieval scholar, and an antiquarian. During most of this period (1772-77) he was, for instance, the secretary of the Arnamagnaean commission, and in 1772 he went to Stockholm and Uppsala, to investigate the archives there. The Arnamagnaean Commission wanted a chair to be established for Hannes at Copenhagen University, which meant that he had to decide whether or not he wanted to make his permanent home in Denmark. His father wanted him to return to

Iceland and persuaded him to accept the post of assistant bishop, which he held from 1777 to 1785, when he became bishop of Skalholt. And bishop he remained until his death in 1796.

Hannes was regarded as an efficient administrator during these difficult years; nor was he lacking in shrewdness as far as his personal finances were concerned. In 1790 he received a doctorate from Copenhagen University. In the same year he, together with Parson Markus Magnusson of Gardar, founded the Southern Reading Society. He wrote a great deal for the Laerdomslistafelag and was one of the men responsible for the foundation of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag. Hannes was married twice; his first wife was Thorunn Olafsdottir, Magnus Stephensen's sister, who died prematurely; his second wife was Valgerdur Jonsdottir, by whom Hannes had several children. Many of their descendants distinguished themselves, both in Denmark and Iceland, e.g. Niels Finsen (1850-1904), winner of the Nobel prize for medicine in 1903, and Hilmar Finsen (1824-1886), governor (landshofdingi) of Iceland, 1873-1883 .

Hannes Finnsson seems to have been a quiet man, not easily aroused by passion, but very firm once he had reached a decision. One of the main features of his personality was his industry: which he showed equally as a student, a writer, and an administrator.

When investigating Hannes's thought it is logical to begin with his religious ideas as he was a learned theologian and a churchman by profession. He came from a clerical family - his

ancestors had been parsons for generations - and his religious background was orthodox. Although Ludvig Harboe, who brought pietism to Iceland, had connections with Finnur Jonsson and became Hannes's mentor in Copenhagen, Finnur seems not to have been influenced by pietism. At university Hannes specialized in biblical studies, particularly the New Testament. His views on theology were apparently influenced by religious rationalism exemplified by Bishop Balle. Prolific writer though he was, Hannes did not write much on theology, but his biographer, Bishop Jon Helgason, who perhaps is not wholly reliable as far as this subject is concerned because he had a vested interest in it, emphasizes that this was not due to Hannes's being more interested in matters other than religion. Indeed, Jon Helgason says, all three of Hannes's main interests during the last ten years of his life were connected with religion: to get produced a new Icelandic catechism, a new hymn-book, and a new translation of the Bible. Hannes played an important part in the movement that led to the publication of Magnus Stephensen's controversial hymn-book. And he had a new catechism, by Bishop Balle, translated into Icelandic; it replaced the old one by Pontoppidan and was published in 1796. On the other hand, Hannes died before he could do much work on the revision of the new translation of the Bible into Icelandic.

As a religious thinker Hannes stood on the borderline between the old and the new. He relinquished some of the old dogmas, but he did not go the whole way over to religious rationalism as

did Magnus Stephensen, for instance. Hannes adopted supra-naturalism, a movement which came to Denmark from Germany in the years after 1750 and which endeavoured to prove that Christian revelation was not contrary to reason. Hannes was convinced that Christianity and reason could always go together. He did not go so far as to try to rationalize miracles and refute what the rationalists called Old Testament - not Christian - morality. On the other hand, Hannes felt that it was not desirable for people to read nothing but religious material. In the preface to his Kvoldvokur (i.e. "Evening Entertainment"), a reading-book which remained very popular for decades, he said: "I am not so inconsiderate as to demand of anybody that he constantly read religious books to his advantage. On the contrary, I know no easier way of making religious instruction nauseating and repugnant to youths than compelling them to read such material all the time, particularly without preparation and understanding, when their spirits are low or when they are eager to do other things".[2]

As far as I know Hannes did not concern himself very much with politics. It seems that he was an ardent follower of the old order, of the absolute monarchy and the government it imposed on Iceland. Being a champion of the Enlightenment, his values were cosmopolitan and he did not embrace the non-political nationalism or, if we like, national progressivism adhered to, for instance, by the poet Eggert Olafsson. In fact, the differences between the various Icelandic students in Copenhagen in the

1750s and 1760s polarized around these two men and their brothers; it was "the bishop's sons" vs. "the farmers' sons". But if Hannes was reluctant to look back towards Iceland's Golden Age, he was eager to work for his country's improvement; he was concerned with practical matters as well as distinctly "scholarly" enterprises. His essays on farming and demography show this.

Hannes's social and ethical thought was very much determined by his Enlightenment ideas. As a student his position was such that he could indulge in studying things other than his main subject. He studied history with Professor J.C. Kall and attended lectures on natural history, particularly botany, and mathematics, in which he achieved proficiency. He also acquired thorough knowledge of philosophy.and of economics, which is evident, for instance, in Mannf.hall. In addition to this he was an excellent linguist; apart from Icelandic and Danish, he had very good Latin and French, and he knew German, Greek, and some Hebrew. There remains the field in which he was probably most distinguished: Old Norse (or medieval Scandinavian) studies and Icelandic studies in general. Hannes can thus be described as a polyhistor. We shall see that he drew from his rich knowledge of various subjects when formulating his ideas and arguing in favour of them.

Like other Enlightenment thinkers Hannes was of the opinion that man was living in a period of progress and that mankind could live in prosperity. Everybody was to share in the new

Enlightenment. Regarded as a great teacher himself, he was particularly anxious to instruct the young. But all progress and enlightenment was to take place within the framework of the old order; all movements against the solid "old virtues" such as industry and obedience were deplored.

These virtues and Hannes's version of Christian morality in general was the cornerstone of his ethical thought. Such matters will be dealt with more fully below, in connection with the conclusion of Mannf.hall.

(2) Hannes's idea of history as it appears in Mannf.hall.

As could be expected from a theologian and a bishop, Hannes believed in divine intervention in human affairs - that God ruled the world. However, references of this kind are found only in the introductory and the concluding chapters. The opening paragraph of the essay runs like this: "Epidemic, war and inflation are described as the sharpest rods in God's hand wherefrom King David formerly was given the opportunity of selecting one."[3] In Chapter 2 there is a reference to "many a remarkable man, a good tool in God's hand".[4] And near the end, when discussing the population decline and the country's recovery, Hannes said: "... should we then despair if it pleases God to bless our means and if we could and would use them ourselves".[5]

Non-deterministic generalizations are found in the essay, especially in the opening chapters and the final section where Hannes tried to establish a general pattern of famine in Iceland, but these are rarely very sweeping. We can take an example from

Chapter 1. Having dealt with the direct effects of famine, Hannes came to the indirect ones: "It brings robbery and theft while it lasts, but after that lack of energy, anarchy together with wilfulness that often remains for a long time afterwards, not to mention hunger sickness that many times has been caused and intensified by famine".[6]

In Chapter 2 Hannes stated why he wrote the essay, which will be gone into more fully below. Suffice it to say here that he took a didactic view of history; he wrote the essay for a specific purpose, going on the assumption that the lessons drawn from the past could be applied to the present.

(3) Mannf.hall.: the historical background

In Chapter 1 I have described the disasters that befell the Icelandic nation in the 1780s: the gigantic volcanic eruption of 1783 and its aftermath, the earthquakes, and the smallpox epidemics. The people were shattered. Despite various misfortunes in the third quarter of the century there had been optimism in the air, inspired by the Enlightenment writers and a more enlightened government policy. After the debacle of the 1780s, on the other hand, the Icelanders could no longer think of the future of their country in terms of material progress; instead, they had to ask themselves whether the country was really inhabitable. How serious the situation was can be seen from the fact that the Danish government drew up some plans for moving people from Iceland to Denmark. Hannes said himself that this applied to the whole population, but the historian

Thorkell Johannesson, an authority on this period, thought that this was a misunderstanding; only the transference of a few hundred paupers was planned.[7] Recently, however, Thorkell's interpretation has been disputed.[8] One thing is certain, that any plans of this kind were unique in Icelandic history.

As bishop of Skalholt Hannes knew perfectly well how serious the situation was: the village of Skalholt had been practically ruined by the earthquakes and he had made visitations to large parts of the bishopric after the disaster struck. Being a champion of the Enlightenment, we may guess that the material and spiritual plight of the nation was a particular cause of worry to him. Hannes had a more thorough knowledge of Icelandic history than anybody else, which made it easy for him to see the current problems of the nation in historical perspective. The likelihood is that having found that the conclusions he could draw from his investigations were encouraging to the nation he reasoned that by writing an extensive essay on the subject and publishing it he would render a service to the Icelandic people. The cynic might ask whether we can exclude the possibility that Hannes actually decided at the outset what conclusion he <u>wanted</u> to reach and then built up his argument in a way that fitted in with this. But there is no evidence that this was the case; indeed, the structure of the essay seems particularly sound.

These were the reasons which Hannes gave why he wrote the essay: "In order to lessen the laments of those who believe that in the days of old there never were as hard times as in

these days, or that the present situation is so grave that the country could never recover; also in order to put some observations to the prudent when they compare earlier and later times, I shall briefly deal with the most remarkable famines in this country, and I would consider that I had not spent a few hours in vain if someone from now on paid more attention to the gentle and rough behaviour (hattsemi) of the country than he has hitherto done."[9]

(4) The structure and the contents of the essay

Mannf.hall. covers the subject from the beginnings of Icelandic history down to the author's time - he probably started writing it in 1786 and finished it in the early nineties. It was printed in 1796 in volume XIV of the annual of the Laerdomslistafelag. The essay, the length of which is in the region of 50,000 words, is divided into 37 chapters, two of which are introductory and five concluding ones (32-34, 36-37). Chapters 3-31 inclusive and Chapter 35 deal with the subject chronologically. Nineteen chapters - which nevertheless constitute only about 1/3 of the narrative - cover the pre-1700 period while seven, making up about 1/4 of the narrative describe the period 1778-1791.

A most remarkable feature of the essay's structure is the extensive use of footnotes, which indeed constitute two thirds of it; of the 344 footnotes, some are fairly long. While the main chapters provide factual information in the form of a chronological narrative, the footnotes give the sources and explain

and analyse individual points.

(5) The sources

Hannes Finnsson was probably the most widely read Icelander of his day; he possessed one of the best private libraries in the country, stocked with Icelandic as well as foreign books, and a good collection of manuscripts.[10] When writing Mannf.hall. he drew continuously from his immense reading and learning, using sources in Icelandic, Danish, Latin, Swedish, French and German.

We can divide the sources referred to by Hannes into six categories. In the first one there are various Icelandic historical works such as the sagas of Icelanders, sagas of the Norwegian kings, bishops' sagas, Sturlunga saga, the available medieval and post-Reformation annals ~~both~~, the works of Arngrimur Jonsson, Torfaeus, Jon Halldorsson, Historia Ecclesiastica Islandiae - in other words most of the basic works of Icelandic historiography.

Secondly, Hannes made good use of public documents and other primary sources. These included the old codes, records of court decisions at the Althing printed in the Althingisbaekur (he may have obtained information about these court decisions from the annals as well), parish registers, censuses, records of the bishops, petitions, and the correspondence of the royal commissioners Arni Magnusson and Pall Vidalin in the first decade of the eighteenth century.

Thirdly, there were various eighteenth century books and essays which cannot be classified as general histories and which usually dealt with relatively narrow themes. These included the essays in the annual of the Laerdomslistafelag written by several

leading men in the country, e.g. Skuli Magnusson, Olafur Stefansson, Magnus Stephensen, and Stefan Thorarinsson. Hannes also used accounts by Icelanders of state-sponsored expeditions into the country, that of Eggert Olafsson and Bjarni Palsson in the 1750s, that of Olafur Olafsson (Olavius) in the 1770s, and Magnus Stephensen's account of the volcanic eruption at Lakagigir in 1783.

The fourth category includes poetry. Lines from a poem are occasionally given as a historical source, for instance in order to prove Hannes's assumption that there had always been a tendency to compare the present unfavourably with the past. Sometimes aphorisms are drawn from poetry.

Fifthly, some of Hannes's secondary sources for Icelandic history were works, contemporary or near contemporary, written by Danes. Among these were: a book by Niels Horrebow, a natural scientist whom the government sent to Iceland in 1749, called Tilforladelige Efterretninger om Island (Reliable Accounts of Iceland); Philosophische Schilderung der gegenwartigen Verfassung von Island and Physicalische und statistische Beschreibung von Island by C.U.D. Eggers, the secretary of the Landsnefnd of 1785 (see glossary); Pontoppidan's ~~Annales Danicos diplomatiae~~ Annales ecclesiæ Danicæ diplomatici; an essay by Justitsraad Hammeleff; a list of those born in Iceland between 1735 and 1770; some news items in two Copenhagen periodicals, Berlingske Kjbenhavnske Tidender and Berlingske Stats Tidender.

Finally, an essential part of Hannes's basic argument

rested on comparison with other countries, and in the essay he drew from his extensive knowledge of world history and literature. The Bible is referred to many times, classical authors such as Caesar, Pliny, and Horace occasionally, Bede once, and the extent and effect of famine in European countries in later timesis shown with many examples. Not unnaturally, Hannes looked above all to the Scandinavian countries. An essay by Schioning, Afhandling om Uaar i Norge (On Famine in Norway) is a source frequently referred to; likewise Hannes quoted an essay by Suhm, the Danish historian, and one by Kryger on the climate in Sweden (Hvilka ero Svanska Klimatets Formoner och Olägenhater), also the Swede Olaus Rudbeck's work Atlantica. An annual published by the Swedish Academy, Kongliga Svenska Wetenskaps Acad. nya Handlingar was a source of information about natural history and statistics. Hannes's knowledge of non-Scandinavian writers is also evident. He referred to two German works, which despite their titles apparently dealt with demography and economics rather than theology, Gottliche Ordnung in der Veranderungen des mennschlichen Geschlechtes by Suszmilch and Von der Gute und Weisheit Gotts by Sander. Then there are references to any essay by Lancelot on the seven wonders of the Dauphine, to Boyle's Nouvelle de la Republique des lettres, a German translation of Bossuet's Discours sur l'histoire universelle, and to Davenant.

(6) Source criticism and comments on earlier historiographers and contemporaries

Basically Hannes trusted the Icelandic historical works he used as sources; his criticisms of these are mainly concerned

with minor matters. And his remarks about other works he referred to are on the whole favourable; only very few men received negative comments.

About Jon Egilsson's account of the severe winters of 1518 and 1525 Hannes had this to say: "Then it seems that the previous great prosperity was a thorn in Parson Jon's flesh (this is a literal translation; presumably Hannes meant that Parson Jon was overawed) and therefore the contrast was too sharply drawn" ... "It is not unlikely that what Parson Jon has written ... is somewhat exaggerated."[11] One statement by Bjorn of Skardsa is said to contradict another.[12] About the famine that allegedly took place in 1680 Hannes wrote: "But even though both the annals and the bishop (i.e. Thordur Thorlaksson) ... make so absolute statements about the famine these seem to be caused to a large extent by the fact that people had been used to good years for a long period".[13] Corrections are made to what is said about the famine in the 1750s in Islands Opkomst by Pall Vidalin and in Eggers's Philosophische Schilderung. And about Archdeacon Thorkell Olafsson's chart of the demography of the Holar diocese 1783-1791 Hannes claimed: "I also fear that there are some errors in the list which the honourable archdeacon has been kind enough to give to me, but still I doubt that these are of much importance."[14]

On the other hand, Hannes, like his contemporaries, took most Icelandic medieval texts at face value; this meant that for the period covered by the Sagas of Icelanders their chronological

framework, as understood in Hannes's day, is followed without question. He also seems to have had absolute trust in one annal that later research has shown to be not fully reliable: Austfjardaannall or Setbergsannall.

Sometimes Hannes expressed his respect for historians and other writers in no uncertain terms. He said about Parson Sigurdur Jonsson, the author of an appendix to the oldest Vatnsfjardarannall, that the evidence showed that he had been "an industrious man with a bent for ... antiquarian studies".[15] We read of "the laudable Bjorn of Skardsa".[16] Hannes's grandfather, Jon Halldorsson of Hitardalur, was referred to as "one of the most reliable contemporary (sic) historians"[17] and "the remarkable and careful historian".[18] Jon Jakobsson was spoken of as learned and well respected (frodur og velforthentur).[19] The German works mentioned above are praised if criticized at the same time;[20] the same goes for the works of C.U.D. Eggers.[21] Complimentary references were made to several essays by the Icelandic Enlightenment writers: Magnus Stephensen's account of 1783;[22] Sveitabondi (The Icelandic Farmer) by Landfogeti Skuli Magnusson;[23] Jafnvaegi bjargraedis - medalanna a Islandi (The Balance of the Trades in Iceland),[24] Um hesta (On Horses),[25] and Rit um not af nautpeningi (On Uses of Cattle)[26] by Stiftamtmadur Olafur Stefansson, Tanker til noiere Eftertanke om Uaar og dets Virkninger (in Danish) (Thoughts on Bad Seasons and their Effects) by Amtmadur Stefan Thorarinsson;[27] Um hreppstjornarembaettid a Islandi (On the Office of Hreppstjori in Iceland) by Sherriff Bjorn Tomasson, which dealt with the

provision for livestock;[28] essays by Gunnar Palsson and Magnus Ketilsson, in which the consumption of horse-flesh is defended.[29]

Comments of this kind must, of course, be seen in context of the high-flown language of the age. Further examples of expressions in the same style are easy to find: "the remarkable men" (Einar Sigurdsson and Hakon Arnason),[30] "the works of the learned men",[31] "the most learned author" (Magnus Stephensen),[32] "the wisest men" (Horrebow and others, see below),[33] "the distinguished national poet" (Eggert Olafsson),[34] "the wise man, in many ways distinguished because of his services to Iceland" (Andreas Holt),[35] "the learned sheriff" (Jon Snorrason).[36]

(7) The central theme of the essay

In the essay, Hannes addressed his contemporaries about the lessons to be drawn from eighteenth century demography. It so happened that the first census in Iceland (lists of farmers had been compiled earlier) was taken in 1703, at the beginning of the century in which Hannes lived, and the account of the pre-1700 period must be seen in a different light from the account of the eighteenth century, which is the essence of the essay. One of the main purposes of the first part must have been to put the second part into perspective.

It seems as if Hannes's Leitmotiv in the pre-1700 account is to show that the eighteenth century - taken as a whole - had not been more severe than previous centuries and that the pre-1700 experience of the Icelandic nation could not be used to support the argument that Iceland was uninhabitable. Many

writers had been inclined to exaggerate the severity of the Icelandic climate. Looking back to a "golden age" was not a new phenomenon. Hannes seems to have gone on the assumption that while the quality of the land had deteriorated very much since the Middle Ages[37] (he suggests that research needs to be done on the subject), no major climatic fluctuations had occurred in Iceland since the country was settled. Modern research, however, has shown that this was not so; in particular, "the Little Ice Age" of the northern hemisphere that began in the sixteenth century and lasted until c.1900 affected Iceland seriously.[38] But at the time it was not realized that the progression of the glaciers could be taken as an indication of such a development, and there were no statistical sources of any kind available to prove it.

Several remarks of Hannes's must be interpreted in the context of what has been said above. He lamented that "for long one wrote after another: Islandia perpetuis frigoribus et glacie damnata".[39] The writings of men like Arngrimur Jonsson and Niels Horrebow had not sufficed to do away with misconceptions of this kind.[40] The author of Speculum Regale (now thought to have been written in Norway in the thirteenth century) was one of those who wrote misleading accounts about Iceland; "describes the climate in Iceland as being so harsh that it does not make sense unless people want to excuse it as the exaggerations of a foreigner unacquainted with the country" concerning the famine about the time when the book was written.[41]

A few examples of Hannes's insistence that the past should

not be glorified, which perhaps was strengthened by his Enlightenment philosophy, may be given. "I mention this here in order to show that just like now famine was not infrequent in Thingeyjarsysla in days of old".[42] It is because of lack of evidence rather than absence of hard times that little is known about famine in the fifteenth century, Hannes argues.[43] "It is evident (from various secondary sources) that at the end of this century (the sixteenth) bad years were not infrequent";[44] "the testimony of Jon Egilsson shows that the smallpox epidemic (in 1511) was not on a small scale".[45] About historical nostalgia: "... it is a human fault in all ages to think that everything was better and happier in times of yore than at the present day".[46] As an example of this Hannes took a poem, Samjofnun thessarar aldar, sem nu er, og hennar, sem verid hefur (a comparison between the present century and the previous one) printed in the early seventeenth century; he thought that "frost and frigidity plague the nation, good years are now infrequent" is equally wide of the mark as "the century is not nearly as well instructed in the pure word of God as it was in the days of heresy" (i.e. Catholicism).[47]

In Chapter 33 Hannes said that comparison of the crisis years 1779-1785 with earlier periods was impossible because of lack of written evidence. But it was beyond doubt that more people died in each of the epidemics of 1402 (Black Death), 1495 (Black Death), and 1707 (smallpox) than during the latest famine. The periods of bad seasons in the fourteenth and seventeenth

centuries lasted longer and were more frequent than in the eighteenth so the effect was probably more severe. A few famines in the past - such as those of 1056, 1311/13, 1371/77, 1601/05, and 1633/39 - had exceeded the latest one, and several had been almost as bad. Moreover, never in the past did the Icelanders receive as much assistance as they received from King Christian VII. Other gifts from abroad proved "that beneficence is the characteristic feature of the excellent Danish and Norwegian nation".[48] This placing of the 1779-85 period in historical perspective underlined the argument, based on demographical evidence, in the following chapter that there was no reason to despair.

(8) General observations on how famine affects Iceland

It seems as if Hannes saw famine essentially in terms of the effects on the national economy rather than in terms of human suffering. He made the point - especially with regard to the 1780s but also as a generalization - that smallpox epidemics killed the most promising people while, in contrast, those who were first to die during famines and of whom most died were spendthrift people, those who were sick and physically inferior. As a result, even though far fewer people died of smallpox in 1785-6 than in the preceding famine, the loss of population from the epidemic was more harmful to the country.[49]

But, also in accordance with his utilitarian views, Hannes emphasized that the cost of famine must not be counted only in loss of lives. Some of those who survive never recover fully

from the ordeal. Not many people dare marry; few children are born. A result of depopulation is that the means of livelihood cannot be exploited to the fullest possible extent; this applies both to farming and fishing.

Hannes's general observations are summed up in Chapter 37 where he put forward 22 annotations on the subject, meant as probabilia and problemata rather than impregnable conclusions. The first annotation is the essence of his argument: "Famine is frequent in Iceland, but in no European country does the population and livestock increase more rapidly; therefore it is not uninhabitable." Hannes mentioned that Horrebow, Eggert Olafsson, Jon Eiriksson, Magnus Stephensen, Thorkell Fieldsted, N. Mohr, and C.D.U. Eggers all reached the same conclusion. He went on to say that those who knew the condition of the peasantry both in Iceland and abroad would agree that in few European countries was the condition of the peasant such that the Icelanders had any reason to be envious - that is, as long as polar ice and volcanic eruptions, factors that have played a part in most famines in Iceland, did not affect the country with increasing severity and the nation kept the liberties it enjoyed at the time when the essay was written. Hannes emphasized this point by referring to a comparison made with Norwegian farmers.[50] Because of his Enlightenment views he attached great importance to the state of education and degree of civilization among the Icelandic population at large. This is best seen in the Kvoldvokur, but also in his pointing out that vagabonds were less wretchedly dressed

in Iceland than in other countries.[51]

Most of the notes deal with the pattern of famine e.g. how it affects different parts of the country. The coastal areas and the sheep-farming areas where grazing in winter was relied upon were most susceptible. A bad harvest, i.e. a hay crop low in quantity and/or quality, followed by more than one severe winter, was the most immediate reason for famine. The pattern of revival after famine is also dealt with; this we will come to later.

(8) <u>The prevention of famine</u>

Chapter 36 is devoted to the question how famine could be avoided or its effects at least minimised. Some of the notes in the final chapter are also conconcerned with this matter. Here there are some clues to Hannes's economic and ethical thought. His proposals reflect the belief of the champions of the Icelandic Enlightenment that the state of the Icelandic economy and the condition of the Icelandic people could be improved, and, secondly, they reflect his concern about the social upheaval in the country; here it is seen how important an issue the maintenance of law and order was to him. This attitude invites comparison with Jon Espolin and Magnus Stephensen.

Hannes's firstproposal was that no-one should be allowed to be unemployed and to rove about; if fines could not be imposed, the penalty for vagabondry and "the going on unnecessary errands" should be corporal punishment. If this kind of punishment were not applied, what methods of compulsion were left, Hannes æked.[52]

Secondly, the support of paupers should primarily take the form of prevention of utter poverty, especially by providing people with means of sustenance so they would not have to leave their farms. Thirdly, depots should be set up in every county - and in future perhaps more densely - for the benefit of the public. This was an idea that Amtmadur Stefan Thorarinsson had come up with in an essay in the annual of the Laerdomslistafelag.

(10) The demography of Iceland in the eighteenth century; Hannes's use of statistics

As far as I know Hannes Finnsson was the first Icelander to use statistics in a historical work. Because of his education Hannes was very well equipped to handle statistics. While at university he attended lectures on pure mathematics, applied mathematics, and algebra. He gained such a reputation in the field that he became opponens ordinarius at mathematical disputations in auditorio superiori of Copenhagen University. Indeed, Hannes showed particular skill in using population and livestock figures in such a way that the way was prepared for his conclusions at the end of the essay.

Before Hannes wrote his essay the demographic picture of eighteenth century Iceland was unclear. The figures given for the depopulation during the smallpox epidemic in the early part of the century and famines later on varied considerably, and no writer on the subject had been able to see it in perspective. Hannes, on the other hand, tied the pieces of evidence together and established a demographic pattern.

He put emphasis on the fact that the population increased rapidly in periods that were relatively favourable. From 1735 to 1751 - even though there were bad years in between - there was an increase of more than 6,000 or almost 400 per year.[53] By 1751 the population had reached the level it was at before the big smallpox epidemic, which supposedly resulted in the death of 18,000 people. During the debacle of the 1750s there was a population decline of some 6,000;[54] this was more than made up for in the period 1758-1777,[55] which, even if there was no famine, witnessed a smallpox epidemic and a scab disease that killed off a considerable proportion of the sheep in the country. Then there was a decline of some 10,000 during the critical period 1779-1787,[56] but from 1787 to 1791, the latest date given in the essay, there was a marked increase again. The loss of 10,000 would not be permanent; it would be made up for in 28 years if the present rate of growth continued.[57] Therefore, Hannes argued, there was no reason to worry about the country becoming depopulated. He did not say so explicitly, but the underlying assumption was that once the population had dropped far below the peak mark of 50,000 - reached three times in the eighteenth century: in the very early century, about 1750, and in the late 1770s - it always rose rapidly again. Hannes's conclusions can hardly be said to amount to a demographic theory, but his ideas, put forward in a work published two years earlier than An Essay on the Principle of Population, were certainly proto-Malthusian in the sense that he maintained, with reference to Iceland only,

that there were definite limits for how much the population could grow.

Aspects of Icelandic demography had been dealt with in earlier essays by Hannes and in some of the works he used as sources, but Mannf.hall., being the first major essay on Icelandic demography and the first one where it is seen in perspective, was a unique work in its time. Some similarities to it can be found in Magnus Stephensen's books on Iceland in the eighteenth century, particularly as regards the historical perspective and the use of statistics, but the approach of Espolin, who used Mannf.hall. extensively as a source, to historical writing was very different.

There are ten tables in Mannf.hall., nine of which give demographic data.[58] The information contained in the remaining one (4) is directly connected with the condition of the people. A list of these tables (they are not numbered in the essay itself), giving the sources when available, throws light on this aspect of Hannes's work:

(1) The population of Arnessysla 1703-92
Fourteen figures given. (Taken from various sources)

(2) The effect of famine in the Holar diocese 1784
(Bishop Arni Thorarinsson)

(3) The proportion between dead and surviving livestock during the Moduhardindi
(Philologica Scandinavica)

(4) The number of farm-houses and other houses that fell down or were severely damaged by the earthquakes in August, 1784
(Reports from parsons and hreppstjorar)

(5) The population of the Holar diocese, 1783-91
(Ex-archdeacon Thorkell Olafsson)

(6) The population of the Skalholt diocese, 1785

(7) Those who died in Iceland, 1784-5, classified according to age

(8) The population and the number of farmers, especially in the Skalholt diocese, as well as the average number of people living on each farm, 1703, 1778-83, 1791
(Various censuses)

(9) The population of individual counties in 1703
(The 1703 census)

(10) The population and the livestock of Arnessysla, 1785, 1787, and 1792

We may possibly group the ten tables into two categories: those which are primarily meant to support, explain or sum up the argument based on literary sources, and those which are used to support an independent argument. Tables 1, 6, 8, and 10 come within the second category, which now will be dealt with more closely.

Table 1 is used to show the close connection between the state of the economy at any given time and fluctuations in population. Hannes secured figures from fourteen years, either relating to the population of Arnessysla or the number of farms occupied; when the number of both were known in the same year Hannes calculated the number of persons living on a single farm. He showed that the difference between any two adjacent figures was determined by the respective number of good and bad years in the interval, volcanic eruptions, and epidemics. Hannes also

used this table to prove the significance of the population increase in the 1758-77 period.

Table 6 shows the effect of famine on the demographic structure. Each county in the Skalholt diocese is dealt with separately. The population is divided into seven categories and several sub-categories; the percentage of the population of each of the three quarters (an administrative division) in the diocese is also given. The categories and sub-categories are: farmers; householders (husbaendur) (married couples, widowers, widows, young unmarried men, young unmarried women); lodgers - the same subdivisions as under "householders"; people married; people widowed; lepers. The last four categories are divided between the sexes.

On the basis of these data Hannes drew various conclusions with regard to the Moduhardindi (though the inferences can also apply to other famines): more men than women died as a result of the famine; the reduction of the number of farms was more drastic than the depopulation, and the shortage of labour was felt more when the depopulated farms were reoccupied; the number of married couples was very low; a considerable proportion of those in charge of a farm were not married; there was a very large number of widows in the country; relatively few widows in Iceland remarried; the number of paupers was still high even though it was mostly poor people who died during the famine; the lepers were drastically reduced in number. The demographic structure would be very different after several good years when

the population had reached a more normal level.

Hannes also drew several conclusions from the variations in the factors that made up table 8. The smaller the population, the fewer are both the homes and the people living in each home; and on the average, there has been the highest number of people living in each home in the eastern quarter, the lowest number in the western quarter.

Table 10 indicates how rapidly livestock could increase after a famine even though the seasons were not particularly good. Figures from three years after the Moduhardindi are given for the following: the population, the number of able-bodied men apart from the masters of the house, cows, heifers due to have calves, dry cattle, calves, milch ewes, year old sheep, year old wethers, older wethers, tamed horses, unbroken horses, foals. The importance of the findings was emphasized by pointing out that the regions where the sheep was the most important domestic animal recovered more quickly than the ones, like Arnessysla, where cattle-farming was more important. In the notes to the same chapter (35) Hannes pointed out that domestic animals were exceptionally fertile after a famine. Likewise there was usually a rapid increase in population after famines, wars, and epidemics, but for biological reasons the number of livestock always rose more quickly.

(11) Natural history

Bearing in mind that the subject of Mannf.hall. is how the climate, volcanic eruptions, and other natural forces shape the

life of the Icelandic nation, and that Hannes was well acquainted with scientific subjects, it is not surprising to find that he made some observations on natural history that were unusual in Icelandic historiography. The following comment on the annalist Benedikt Petursson's account that grass-maggots had rained down in 1702 is very much in the Enlightenment spirit: "It is worth noticing, as it is often written and commonly said that it is raining with grass-maggot, that this is not to be taken literally, but the maggot ... breeds in sandy soil and in dry fields and emerges mostly in rainy weather so inattentive people (oadgaetnir) think that it has rained down."[59] And Hannes's approach is always scientific by the standards of the age. There is a good description of two animal diseases, gaddur and oskutonn, and it is explained why they affected livestock in 1783 and 1784.[60] The effects of the earthquakes in the South in 1784 are dealt with at some length, not only the damage done to houses, but also how the land was affected.[61] The effect of landslides is described; it is explained how some hot springs disappeared, how some bogs dried up, how meadows where there used to be shallow lakes sank, and how other meadows were spoiled.

Hannes's knowledge of botany is often to be seen. He took the time of the blooming of certain flowers, for which he always gives the Latin names, as an indication of what the spring was like in a particular year; Bjorn of Skardsa's account of the early blooming of the buttercup and the early egg-season of 1525 is referred to,[62] and reports on the flowering time of several

plants in Sweden in the late eighteenth century are used as a means of comparing the seasons in Iceland and in Sweden in 1781 and 1784.[63] Hannes reported his own observations on the flowering time of some plants in Iceland - presumably in all cases at Skalholt - in 1784, 1785, 1788, 1790, 1791 and 1792.[64] He also described the effect of the volcanic eruption of 1783 on the country's vegetation as a whole.[65] Rather interesting is his observation that there has never been pernicious frost in the spring after the dandelion has flowered.[66] How well founded this generalization is I do not know, but it is remarkable that Icelandic folklore contains legions of references to signs and forebodings as to what the weather would be like during the next few weeks or the next season. Some, such as that mentioned above, may have a scientific basis; others can be regarded as superstitious. Indeed, Hannes referred to an Icelandic saying: "The hard times of winter are over when the tail feathers of the curlew make a whining sound", which he said was proven by experience. On the other hand, he said that the Swedish saying: "After the snipe has arrived no horse will starve to death" was not applicable to Iceland.[67]

The question arises how far Hannes was influenced by eighteenth century writers who stressed the importance of climate in the shaping of the destiny of individual nations. To this I cannot give a satisfactory answer. But since Hannes was widely read it seems very likely that he had read Montesquieu and some of the classical Enlightenment historians. If so, this may have

stimulated his interest in the climate, as opposed to the weather, of Iceland. But there is little discussion of the role of climate in general in Mannf.hall. Hannes only mentioned "mild climate and fertility" as two of the reasons why it would be expected that other nations were better off than the Icelanders.[68]

REFERENCES

1 See Thorkell Johannesson, Saga Islendinga, vol. VII, pp.513-520.

2 "... ekki er eg svo onaergaetinn, ad eg heimti af nokkrum ad lesa sifelldlega gudfraedisbaekur ser til gagns, thvert a moti veit eg engan beinari veg ad gjora unglingum gudlegan laerdom vaemisaman og leidan en ad neyda tha til ad hafa hann um hond si og ae, einkum yfir hals og hofud undirbunings- og skilningslaust, thegar illa liggur a theim eda sinnid er fullt af eftirlangan annarra hluta."

3 p.1. "Drepsott, strid og dyrtid eru kalladir their snorpustu vendir i Guds hendi, af hvorjum David konungur atti fordum kost a ad velja einn."

4 p.4. "... margan merkismann, gott verkfaeri i Guds hendi"

5 p.160. "... skyldum ver tha orvaenta ... ef Gudi thoknadist ad blessa vor efni og ver sjalfir kynnum og vildum ad hagtaera theim vel?"

6 "Thad faerir med ser ran og stuldi, medan thad yfirstendur, en sidan dugnadar- og stjornleysi med sjalfraedi, sem vidbrennur lengi a eftir, ad eg eigi tali um hungurpest, er oftsinnis baedi kveikzt hefur a hallaeri og alizt a thvi."

7 Thorkell Johannesson, p.282f.

8 Sigurdur Lindal, "Thjodarflutningur til Jotlandsheida. Hugleiding umn sogulegar stadreyndir", Skirnir CXLV (1971), pp.38-59.

9 "Til ad minnka vil hja theim, sem meina ad aldregi i fyrndinni hafi verid svo hart sem i theirra tid edur ad thessara tida hardindi seusvo stor, ad landid geti aldrei komizt aftur til batnadar; lika og til ad andaefta a athugaefni handa theim forsjalu, naer their saman bera hinar fyrri og sidari tidir, vil eg fatt eitt minnast a thau markverdustu hallaeri her a landi og vil kalla mig eigi

til onytis hafa varid fam stundum, ef einhvorr heraf gaefi betri gaum ad landsins blidu og stridu hattsemi en hann hingad til kynni ad hafa gjort."

10 A list of his books (preserved in the National Archive of Iceland), compiled when his property was evaluated after his death, includes 240 works on various subjects and in several languages. Many of Hannes's manuscripts now form a part of the manuscript collection of the National Library of Iceland.

11 p.38f. "... tha synist thad sem Joni presti hafi blaett i augum su mikla velmegan, sem adur hafdi verid i Arnessyslu, og hafi thvi samlikingin hja honum ordid nokkud sterk." "Ekki er otrulegt, ad nokkud kunni ad vera ykt i thvi, sem Jon prestur Egilsson skrifad hefur ..."

12 p.42

13 p.65 "En tho baedi annalar og lika biskupinn i strax tedum ordum fullyrdi svo freklega thetta hardaeri, tha synist thad ad miklu leyti orsakast af thvi, ad menn hofdu i langan tima verid argaezku vanir ..."

14 p.137. "Eg er lika uggandi um, ad i theim listum, sem velnefndur profastur hefir synt mer thann godvilja ad meddeila mer, muni vera einhvorjar villur, en eg efast samt um, ad thaer seu mikilvaegar."

15 p.35 "... idinn madur og gefinn fyrir fornfraedum fodurlandsins"

16 p.34

17 p.65

18 p.164

19 p.195

20 p.8

21 p.5, p.88

22 p.130

23 p.149

24 p.185, p.203

25 p.153

26 p.154

27 p.190, p.198

28 p.198

29 p.103

30 p.49. "... their merku menn."

31 p.103. "... rit enna laerdu manna..."

32 p.116. "... enn halaerdi rithofundur..."

33 p.158. "... their vitrustu menn..."

34 p.160. "... thad ypparlega thjodskald."

35 p.162. "...thann vitra og i morgu af Islandi velforthenta merkismanni"

36 p.164. "... thess laerda syslumanns..."

37 p.192

38 See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Histoire du climat depuis l'an mil, Paris 1967.

39 p.5. "Lengi fram eftir timum skrifadi einn eftir annan..."

40 p.6f

41 p.14. " lysir tho Islands vedrattufari svo hordu, ad thad getur ekki stadizt, nema menn vilji afsaka thad med okunnugs, utlends manns ykjum um tha yfirstandandi eda nyafstadna hallaerarod."

42 p.19. "Eg get thessa her til ad syna, ad i Thingeyjarsyslu hafa ad fornu eins og nu hallaeri eigi verid otid..."

43 p.35

44 p.42

45 p.43. "Ad su bolusott hafi eigi alllitil verid vitnar Jon prestur Egilsson..."

46 p.192. "... er thad annmarki manna a ollum oldum ad halda ad allt hafi betur og lukkulegar tilgengid i fyrndinni en a theirra tid."

47 p.193. "Frost og kuldi kvelja thjod, koma nu sjaldan arin god..." "Ekki er naerri old svo frod i Guds ordi klaru, sem hun var a villuarum."

48 p.157. "...ad godgjordasemi er adall ennar itru donsku og norsku thjodar."

49 p.134, p.138f

50 p.162

51 p.206f

52 p.88

53 p.80

54 Chapter 24

55 Chapter 25

56 Chapter 31

57 p.159

58 p.93, p.114, p.115, p.125, p.137, p.140, p.148, p.151, p.165, p.174.

59 p.76. "That er adgaetanda, ad thar sem oft finnst skrifad og folk almennilega talar, ad madki rigni, er ekki eftir ordsins hljodan ad skilja, en madkurinn (eruca edur larva) klekst ut i sandjord eda hardvelli og gefur sig mest upp og i ljos i regnvidrum, svo oadgaetnir meina honum hafi nidur ur lofti rignt."

60 120ff

61 pp.124-30

62 p.52

63 p.104f, p.114

64 p.119, p.170ff

65 p.110f

66 p.119f

67 p.132

68 p.4. "... milda loft og frjosemi"

CHAPTER 10

MAGNUS STEPHENSEN

(1) His life

Magnus Stephensen was born at Leira, W Iceland, in 1762, the son of Sigridur Magnusdottir and Olafur Stefansson, who later became the first Icelandic stiftamtmadur and who for a while was the most influential man in the country. Indeed, Olafur Stefansson's family gained extraordinary prominence in Icelandic affairs in the late eighteenth century; it was not until c.1810 that its power visibly began to decline (it remained, however, fairly influential until the end of the nineteenth century). Magnus's talent became evident when he was very young and by the age of 17 he had qualified for admission to Copenhagen University. But his father, who nourished great ambitions for his son, thought he was too young to go abroad and instead sent him to Bishop Hannes Finnson of Skalholt for further instruction. There is no doubt that he greatly influenced Magnus.

In 1781 Magnus finally sailed to Copenhagen. Law was his main subject, but, being generously supported financially and encouraged to acquire a broad education by his father, he also studied other things such as the natural sciences and foreign languages. He gained a reading knowledge of Swedish, German, French, Latin and Greek (he was always very fond of classical studies), and later in life he learned English, which very few people in Iceland knew in this period. Magnus is said to have

wondered later on whether it would have suited him better to become a clergyman than a judge,[1] and it is possible that he was inclined to study theology. His knowledge of natural history stood him in good stead when the Government sent him to Iceland in 1783 to investigate the gigantic volcanic eruption at Lakagigir. Later he worked for the Rentekammer in Iceland. On his return to Copenhagen he resumed his studies and graduated in 1788. No doubt he could have made a career in Denmark, but urged on by his father, whose prestige was now very much on the rise, he returned home to become a varalogmadur (vice-l.) in the North and the West and a logmadur in the same area a year later, in 1789. He married his cousin - not uncommon practice among Olafur Stefansson's family - and took up residence at Innri-Holmur in Borgarfjardarsysla where he lived until 1813 when he moved to Videy, an island near Reykjavik, where he lived for the rest of his life. Magnus's role in the legal history of Iceland is very important. His influence was felt in the abolition, in 1800, of the Althing at Thingvellir, which then had become nothing but a high court, and the establishment of the new national high court, the Landsyfirrettur, in Reykjavik over which he presided until his death in 1833. Being the highest judge in the country for 44 years, Magnus was the champion, against fierce opposition at times, of a humanitarian interpretation of penal law.

Magnus is also remembered for his part in the struggle for freer trade in Iceland and for his part in the events of

the difficult years 1807-10 when Iceland could not be effectively ruled from Denmark and external trade almost came to an end; at that time he showed great dexterity in dealing with the British, who controlled the northern seas.

Magnus's contribution to Icelandic culture is of the same order of magnitude as his contribution to its legal practices. Together with Bishop Hannes Finnsson he ranks as the foremost champion of the Enlightenment in Iceland. When Magnus returned to Iceland in 1788 the Laerdomslistafelag was in decline after the death of Jon Eiriksson, and in 1794 the Landsuppfraedingarfelag was founded on Magnus's initiative (see Chapter 1). The society was changed into an independent institution or academy called Islands suppfraedingarstiftun (The Icelandic Institution for Enlightenment). Magnus was in charge of the book publication of the society and all its activity for the remainder of the period it was active. After 1800 the Institution had the only printing press (situated at Leirargardar from 1795 to 1816, at Beitistadir 1816-1819, at Videy after 1819) in the country; this meant that Magnus Stephensen could, in practice, decide entirely on his own what was printed there. Soon he was criticized for treating the affairs of the Institution entirely as if they were his own and some people thought that he made a personal profit on the printing press. This claim was certainly not justified, but it is true that he never published any accounts. In 1826 Magnus was severely attacked for these reasons in Danish periodicals by Vigfus Erichsen,

Jon Eiriksson's nephew. Nevertheless he remained in charge of the printing press until his death. In fact, the Institution was partially paralysed when intercourse with the outside world was interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars in 1807. From 1810 to 1816 very little was printed, and even after that not very much compared with what had been. The most important post-1816 publication was the periodical Klausturpósturinn (Klp.).

The society, and Magnus himself, published books on a wide variety of topics.[2] There were treatises on theology, law and farming although the strictly practical element was not quite as strong as in publications during the earlier Icelandic Enlightenment. A new hymn-book was published and several literary works. Then there were collections of essays and short stories that were meant to instruct and entertain at the same time. Among these books were some of the most popular publications of the society such as Sumargjof (Summer's Present - stories for children) by Gudmundur Jonsson and Kvoldvokur by Bishop Hannes Finnsson. The miscellanea by Magnus himself, however, such as Vinagledi (Friends' Pleasant Meetings) and Gaman og alvara (Matters Serious and Frivolous) met with a mixed reception, although the reaction culminated in the hymn-book affair (see Chapter 1).

Looking at the period as a whole we see that Magnus's work was not altogether successful in any obvious manner although his contribution in making the country ready for later developments must be regarded as important. There were several

reasons for this. Magnus was not a flexible man. He found it difficult to adapt his ideas, which were predominently derived from the cosmopolitan culture of the Enlightenment, to native values. In his zeal to educate his country and improve its lot, to introduce religious rationalism and humanitarian ideas on penal law and to uproot superstition, he tended to alienate those who did not share his views. These "enemies of the light" Magnus attacked severely in return. Secondly, the material adversity of the Icelanders in the period c.1780-c.1820 (see Chapter 1) had a restrictive effect upon cultural life in the country. Thirdly, after the debacle of the Napoleonic Wars Magnus was less influential with the Danish government than previously and the political power of his family was not the same as before. Fourthly, Magnus's ideals became increasingly anachronistic in a period characterized by nationalism and Romanticism which had largely turned its back on the values of the Enlightenment. Magnus became more and more an isolated figure, and it was left to men like Baldvin Einarsson, the Fjolnismenn, and Jon Sigurdsson, who were in step with the times, to bring his work for the benefit of the Icelandic nation to some kind of fruition.

(2) Magnus as a thinker

Magnus's voluminous works offer ample evidence for his thought in general, and one book, Raedur Hjalmars a Bjargi ... (Rae.Hj.Bj.) (The Speeches of Hjalmar of Bjarg), published in 1819 - one of Magnus's most successful publications - states

his views on many things in a nut-shell.

The full name of the book is Raedur Hjalmars a Bjargi fyrir bornum sinum um fremd, kosti og annmarka allra stetta og um theirra almennustu gjold og tekjur (The speeches of Hjalmar of Bjarg to his children on the renown, virtues, and vices of all classes and their most common expenditure and incomes). This didactic tract - to a certain extent no doubt conceived as a handbook on law - is short, only about 37,000 words long, and naturally it does not express fully all aspects of Magnus's Weltanschauung. But here an attempt will be made to present a brief general picture of this based on the sources I have investigated.

Religious thought. As indicated above Magnus was a devout Christian in the late eighteenth century Danish rationalistic mould. As such he put more emphasis on morals than on dogma (see below). He wanted to uproot superstition and orthodoxy. His concept of progress was progress through divine intervention. In his view, people must not be discouraged by temporary setbacks; perhaps these were for the benefit of mankind. He thought that the Earth could be an Eden and a well of abundance if only mankind knew how to behave. The fortunate position that man now found himself in was a sign of God's gracious guidance of human affairs; the eighteenth century in which a new world had been born was the most remarkable period in history.

Political thought. Magnus was a loyal monarchist - his

praise of the Danish monarchy no doubt was an expression of heartfelt conviction. As a royal official whose political fortune depended largely on the king's personal attitude towards him he often expressed these feelings. His ideal was an enlightened Danish monarch who was concerned equally about all his subjects including the Icelanders. However, as Thorkell Johannesson has pointed out,[3] he came to be disillusioned about the way the Crown Prince, later King Frederick VI, and his circle governed Iceland; it was obvious that narrow Danish interests came first with them. Magnus's fight for freer trade for Iceland had been unsuccessful, and his ideal had turned out to be only a dream. However, it seems as if fundamentally his ideas had not changed much late in life. "Firm government and enlightenment should go hand-in-hand" he says in Rae.Hj.Bj.

Social thought. All the classes in Icelandic society have a necessary function but every one of them held some dubious views on the other classes, Magnus argues in Rae.Hj.Bj. In that work he deals extensively with the role of three classes - the peasantry, the clergy, and civil servants. The mercantile class, craftsmen, and physicians are discussed more briefly. Every class is, it is claimed, a part of an organic whole, and if everybody performs his duties conscientiously, all the classes are of equal importance. "Working is necessary for keeping one's health and one's life". Magnus felt antipathy towards lausamenn, migrant workers and people without a permanent occupation.

Hjalmar advises one of his three sons and his two daughters on the duties of a farmer and a farmer's wife. They should be cleanly and frugal without being parsimonious. They should treat their domestic servants well, yet maintain reasonably strict discipline. Their children should also be disciplined. "Nothing in the country has declined more than domestic discipline", Magnus says. It is interesting to notice that Magnus and his contemporary Jon Espolin, different as their Weltanschauungen were, had similar views on discipline on the farms, the lausamenn, and the development of Icelandic society.

Ethical thought. Although he was a champion of discipline Magnus was not necessarily authoritarian. Hjalmar of Bjarg, for instance, does not want to force his sons to choose a profession that is not to their liking (the only choice open to Hjalmar's daughters was between being a housewife and a maidservant). Moral doctrine rather than fear of punishment should secure people's good behaviour: it is the task of the clergy to teach morality. Magnus's estimation of virtues and vices was in accordance with Christian teachings. As the chief virtues Magnus enumerated prudence, circumspection, honesty, decency, and benevolence. Clemency within reasonable limits he also regarded as a virtue. "The greatest nobility is that which follows a kind and virtuous spirit." The most dangerous vices are envy, pride and averice. When Hjalmar advises his children on the choice of a spouse he puts emphasis on reason but does not make much of the notion of romantic love. He tells his daughters that the

best "weapons" of women are a gentle disposition and kindness.

(3) Magnus's idea of history

First of all it must be established what prompted Magnus to write history - what the circumstances were of his writing.

Magnus had a very sound knowledge of history, both ancient, medieval, and modern; he was most at home in the history of Iceland of later times and in Icelandic legal history. But presumably he never wanted to be a major historical writer; hence history does not feature very prominently in his voluminous writings.

The question where to draw a line between journalism and history proper has vexed many people, but it seems reasonable to regard Magnus's writings on events in Iceland and overseas in the periodicals Klp. and Minnisverd tidindi (Minn.tid.) as serious contributions to historical literature. In the first volume of Minn.tid. he went seven years back, and even in Klp., when it was published as a monthly, the accounts are orderly; things are seen in historical perspective. So it seems justifiable to discuss Magnus as a historian of his own day as well as an historian of eighteenth century Iceland.

The first volume of Minn.tid. was printed at Leirargardar 1796-98a Magnus wrote a preface, Til lesarans (To the Reader), where he speaks of "this attempt of mine to give my dear countrymen some information about remarkable events and revolutions around us in our time".[4] Intelligent people could from this "learn to know God's wonderful guidance of this world, be

instructed, improve themselves and gradually part with all prejudices and superstition, which for too long have thwarted many attempts towards progress and many praiseworthy enterprises in our country".[5] In other words, history is to instruct and enlighten people; this is a didactic view of history. Minn.tid. must be seen in the general context of the publications of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag/Islands uppfraedingarstiftun in its most active period. In the preface to the belated edition of vol.II of Minn.tid. which Magnus co-wrote with his brother Stefan he says: "I ask benevolent readers to appreciate this and any other contribution of mine towards the instruction and the edification of the public; from others I do not wish and do not expect anything of that kind".[6]

Klp. on the other hand, was launched when Magnus's publishing activity was on the decline; it was also different from Minn.tid. in that it was not designed primarily as a news magazine. As Magnus pointed out, The Icelandic Literary Society catered for the need for news by publishing the annual Islenzk sagnablod (Isl.sagn.), mostly written by Finnur Magnusson. Klp. can thus be described as the general mouthpiece of Magnus Stephensen; the only particular reason he gave for including news was that as Isl.sagn. were published only annually he wanted to provide this service to his readers in the interval.

Magnus wrote two versions of his book on Iceland in the eighteenth century in Icelandic (these are largely identical) and one in Danish, printed at Leirargardar in 1805 and 1806 and

in Copenhagen in 1808, respectively. The Danish version is fuller and more systematic than the Icelandic ones. Apparently Magnus was thinking of writing a third version, in English, but nothing came of the idea.[7]

In the Icelandic version of the work, Eftirmaeli atjandu aldar fra ey-konunni Islandi (Eft.atj.ald.) (literally: An obituary on the eighteenth century from the "island-woman" Iceland) the personification of Iceland addresses the eighteenth century in high-flown language. In a fairly long preface to this book Magnus (in the name of the island-woman) states the reasons why he wrote it. He says that there was not a pecuniary motive behind it; this obituary was written "for the edification and entertainment of those of my countrymen who are interested in such matters"; it is to encourage people to rid themselves of disorderly habits, carelessness, improvidence, and lack of common purpose and private enterprise in gaining a livelihood; to mend corrupt morals and ways of thought and "to quench superstition and prejudices, strife between various fashions and disrupting dissention that does not befit civilized persons".[8]

The Danish edition was written during Magnus's stay in Copenhagen in the winter 1807-8; it was dedicated to Frederick VII, who had just come to the throne after governing as Crown Prince for several years. This work was, we can imagine, written to enhance Magnus's reputation with the Danish government. Magnus says openly that he intended this work to serve as a guide on

Icelandic affairs for the Danish government, and he puts forward various proposals for reform. It is addressed to a different audience from Eft.atj.ald.: the island-woman personification is dropped, and the approach is generally more down to earth.

The three main features of Magnus's idea of history can be seen in the excerpts from Magnus's works mentioned above. These are: (a) belief in divine providence; (b) belief in progress - which is firmly linked with (a); and (c) the view that history taught lessons.

The study of history enabled people to realize divine providence. We have already quoted Magnus's comment on "God's wonderful guidance of this world". He says on the bloodbath of the French Revolution that "these events are to us Icelanders like the beckoning of God's hand".[9] When he compares the condition of the Icelanders with that of other Europeans he says that "divine providence and grace made wisdom and peace reign supreme in the heart of our king" so that the monarchy did not get involved in any wars.[10] In connection with the Emperor's "encroachment" in Italy, a reference is made to "the judge who has promised to listen to the lamentations of the oppressed".[11] A certain Erlendur Gudmundsson's marvellous rescue after his adventures at sea is seen as a sign of God's guidance.[12] In the introduction to the account of the period from the spring of 1797 to the spring of 1798 we read: "A great many events have taken place since the spring of 1797 that can convince us ignorant men of God's astonishing and

fatherly guidance of our world, yes, convince us that even the most terrible events and undertakings of mankind may, under his providence, be the means of achieving perfection and happiness. Let us therefore respectfully contemplate his wise purpose in the revolutions of things; we should not, on grounds of foolish prejudices, dare speak ill of them and doubt their eventual fortunate consequences (which lead to these revolutions). The events of the year lead us more often to rejoice than to mourn ... sorrow must often accompany joy ... both may be regarded as equally important for men for their personal experience, progress and real joy in life".[13] This passage neatly sums up Magnus's view of divine providence and progress. A similar note is struck in Magnus's introduction to part two of volume II of Minn.tid. (for spring 1800 to spring 1801), where he sums up the eighteenth century: "The eighteenth century gave us memorable signs of God's wonderful rule of the world and kindness to us, taught us to recognize this and led us to learn about and contemplate other things".[14]

The concept of divine providence does not bulk large in the books on Iceland in the eighteenth century although at the end of Eft.atj.ald. when enumerating what has been achieved in the eighteenth century he concludes "for all these benefits I heartily praise God's fatherly providence and safely commit myself to his charge in future";[15] the format does not allow extensive philosophical or metaphysical speculations. However, we get ample evidence in Klp. that Magnus's views on the subject in his old age had not changed since he wrote Minn.tid. In the

last volume of Klp., published in 1826, he surveys the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The passage is worth quoting in full:

The memory of that quarter of a century "can awaken in every Christian's mind living recognition (lifandi vidurkenningu) of the wonderful rule of an omniscient, benevolent, and powerful providence over our world just as of the other world, recognition of the progress made in our world towards greater perfection and improving fortune and of how good can develop out of evil - that is, what we regard as evil after unfortunate temporary experiences. This investigation leads us - even as soon as at the end of this first quarter of the century - away from errors and incorrect judgements concerning the nature, the purpose, and the consequences of several of his (i.e. God's) remarkable acts although it is still left to the future to see the consequences of many of them and describe them still more clearly; we wake up, as if we had been sleeping, to marvel at and praise the wise guidance of Providence in the midst of all the most foreboding revolutions. The last quarter of the century is therefore worth being surveyed again with regard to its most remarkable events; it is worth considering which of its dark consequences now may seem to be clear and which are still shrouded in mystery".[16]

Surveying the revolutionary and Napoleonic period Magnus says that the tempests of the period lead a number of short-sighted persons to be tempted to blame the guidance and justice of Providence. When the veil is removed "we can clearly see

and recognize with awe that such periods of unrest and revolutions are at times equally beneficial and necessary for our Earth in order to cleanse and improve the pestilential air, which had previously in so many places altogether corrupted so many of the governments of the world, infected and deformed them; such periods serve to heal the ills inflicted upon nations and countries by these factors - just like hurricanes and tempests, enormous flashes of lightning, volcanic eruptions, fires, and earthquakes, or decline in population because of famine or epidemics according to the automatic process of nature (vid natturunnar sjalfkrafa gang og umbrot) by the arrangement of the wise and benevolent Providence - these things are by all prudent and enlightened men recognized as God's charitable acts through the forces of nature for the benefit and the progress of the world we live in".[17] It should be noticed here that the concept of Providence with a capital letter cannot really be separated from that of God. Providence is again referred to in connection with Napoleon: the fact that Napoleon got home unscathed from his Egyptian adventure "so he could revivify the declining administration, liberty, and power of France became, however, in the light of his remarkable career, a clear sign that Providence had chosen his extraordinarily clever and enterprising man to bring about major changes both in France and throughout Europe and in most of America - which in various ways contributed to the progress of these regions".[18] This theme is repeated in the final evaluation of

Napoleon's career.[19] Only the Almighty is capable of judging his disposition and plans, it is stated; but perhaps he was selected as an instrument for chastising and reforming Europe as well as other continents. Here the readers are referred to the apostolic counsel on the "wholesomeness and effects of punishments".

In fact, Magnus seems to have thought of Napoleon as an instrument of Providence. Commenting on Napoleon's death: Providence made his talents and luck, in addition to his energy and prudence, help him attain the highest and most powerful position on Earth.[20] Discussing the counter-revolution in Portugal in 1824 it is claimed "that it seems to be chosen by Providence, just like the revolutions in Spain after Napoleon's campaigns, as a means of achieving independence for South America - in a way similar to several other upheavals which have taken place or are to take place in Europe, which will increase the prosperity, the civilization and the happiness of this continent that has suffered for so long".[21]

In the two periodicals, Minn.tid. and Klp. I have found only one instance of the concept of progress being applied within a framework that is not specifically metaphysical. This occurs in Klp. 1826.[22] Surveying the period of the French Revolution and Napoleon Magnus says: "what a stage of progress, in the Enlightenment of mankind, was reached there - even though this cost the life of many".

On the other hand, progress, in secular terms, is the

main theme of the works on Iceland in the eighteenth century, especially the Danish edition. Progress is the yardstick on which historical development is measured.

Island i det Attende Aarhundrede (Isl.Att.Aarh.) has four main themes - all of which are dealt with in the form of question and answer. These are, first, whether Iceland, with regard to enlightenment and culture, has taken important steps forwards or backwards; second, whether or not the judicial system and the government have improved; thirdly, whether civil liberties and freedom to choose one's employment as well as trade and products have increased considerably; fourthly, whether the country has gained increased prosperity and guarantees against want in the future. Here we can ask whether Magnus chose this approach because he regarded it as the easiest way of getting through to his audience: the king and his circle.

In all likelihood, the structure of the work was influenced by considerations of this kind, but not the content.

In Eft.at.j.ald. written two years previously basically the same questions are asked, only in a different form. We find the island-woman asking: "Has there been increased enlightenment among my sons?" "Has my morality improved?" "Have I achieved better material conditions?" And at the end, when he sums up the events of the century Magnus compares the eighteenth century with the previous ones and states on what grounds it - personified in this context - can be praised.

However, it is clear that throughout his life Magnus's basic idea of history was founded on the concept of divine intervention in human affairs.

I have found only two instances of Magnus's discussing the instructive quality of history. This is in Minn.tid., in the introduction to the year 1798. Magnus argues that the study of world history should invite the Icelanders to compare their position with that of other nations - a comparison which should be more advantageous to the Icelandersthan he had thought previously. This, of course, is one of the favourite themes of the Icelandic Enlightenment writers. The same matter is referred to in Klp., December 1820,[23] but at this stage Magnus did not place as much emphasis on the instructive value of history as he had done previously.

But there are many cases of Magnus's making generalizations or theorizing about history, moralizing with reference to historical events, and observing what is needed for the understanding of history. For instance, right at the beginning of the first volume of Minn.tid. he emphasizes that knowledge of geography and previous world history is essential for the understanding of the following account.[24] He advises people not to pass judgements without consideration.[25] We come across Icelandic proverbs: "When people lift their arm high they seldom strike a hard blow." And: "to imitate is easier than to do something original and constructive".[26] Friendship between nations does not last long: "It must be noted that even though

two nations promise each other everlasting friendship, the evidence shows that by doing so they intend the peace and the friendship to last only until they find it convenient to end it.[27] He doubts whether close friendship between envious rulers is possible.[28] The Warren Hastings case leads Magnus to make the following statement: "This shows how difficult mankind finds it to assert its rights against powerful robbers."[29] No-one of the oppressors cared to understand that "the tears and blood of the oppressed is always fuel to the flames of discontent." And a comment on the murder of the Duke of Berry in 1820 is also worth quoting: "To die with such honour is dignified and possible only for a good man."[30] He goes on to refer to the judgement of history: "To murder such innocent honest men constitutes such infamous treason that it will be long until world history can stigmatize this as it deserves." A similar notion of the judgement of history is evident when Magnus says when dealing with the year 1798-99: "It is to be hoped that France evokes more gratitude from mankind by bringing the tax-gathering of the African pirates to an end."[31]

On one occasion "luck in war" is personified - but it is very possible that this is just a literary device with no theoretical implications.[32]

(4) Icelandic history.

(i) Iceland in the eighteenth century

The difference between the Icelandic and Danish versions of Magnus's work on Iceland in the eighteenth century needs

to be accounted for. It appears that even though the subject was treated from a different angle in Isl.Att.Aarh. and the key thematic questions are not identical in the two versions, the bulk of the material is the same, but some of it has been left out and some new material added - the rhetoric of Eft.atj.ald. has largely disappeared in Isl.Att.Aarh. - the general survey at the end is, for instance, longer in the Danish version, and use is made there of three tables showing the position of the Icelandic economy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, the Icelandic versions are, if anything, slightly longer; both are in the region of 80,000 words.

All things considered, in spite of the various differences between the two versions, it seemed justifiable to treat the two editions as one work for the present purpose, and references will be made indiscriminately to both of them.

Both versions, although each in its own way are in structure and presentation thematic rather than chronological. No attempt is made to divide the century into general sub-periods. Secondly, although the work includes a good deal of statistics and general factual information (e.g. the lists of officials, lay and ecclesiastical) it is basically analytical: the purpose of the narrative is to present subject-matter for an analysis. Thirdly, the work is thoroughly documented with extensive footnotes. In the Danish edition there are about 200 footnotes. References are found to a great many books (and many individual essays and poems) published in Iceland or

on Iceland, in Icelandic, Danish, Latin, Swedish, and German, which shows Magnus's command of his sources and his knowledge of contemporary literature.

Individual themes

(a) Government

Here we can make a distinction between views on the absolute monarchy as such and the domestic administrative system.

As for the former, Magnus is grateful for the fatherly guidance of the monarchs and is of the opinion that the government of the country has improved in the course of the century. "The authorities govern me more than previously" says the islandwoman.[33] Although Magnus argues that there are many things remaining to be done in the field of administration, the kings, particularly Christian VII, Frederick VI's father, are praised for issuing decrees of many kinds, even though some of these, such as a decree from 1776 on improved methods of farming, did not have the desired effects.[34] Iceland's debt of gratitude to "conscientious ministers of state" is also stressed.[35] Further, Magnus emphasizes how great an effort the kings, especially Frederick V and Christian VII, made to help the Icelanders, e.g. after the Moduhardindi, and to strengthen the economy.[36] In Eft.atj.ald. Magnus says that one of the greatest benefits the Icelanders derived from Danish rule was their being able to live in peace even when other European nations were involved in war - a leading theme in Minn.tid. By 1808, when Denmark

had become involved in hostilities which affected Iceland severely, this argument was no longer tenable, but then Magnus argued that Iceland's future hopes, after peace had been made, were attached to monarchical government. Magnus obviously chose to overlook the connection between the absolute monarchy and the trade monopoly, which he detested, and the adverse conditions of trade after 1787, which he resented.

Magnus also saw progress in domestic administration. The early eighteenth century was a turbulent period in Iceland. The maintenance of law and order in the period (i.e. the eighteenth century as a whole) was fairly weak, but it was extremely bad in the first two decades.[37] In the early part of the century the way in which the sheriffs and the logmenn performed their duties left much to be desired, and the situation was bedevilled by party disputes and constant discord among the officials. The sheriffs were heavily in debt to the merchants, which meant that the former did not resist the latter's encroachments (yfirgangur) as much as they should have done. Now the situation has improved.[38] The officials are better educated and are obliged to pass an examination in law; however, they should not be allowed to judge cases in which they themselves are involved. Now the authorities residing in Iceland and the merchants no longer oppress everybody. It has long been true that the country's most powerful men, especially the amtmenn and the merchants, retained the ear of the government in Copenhagen. The amtmenn frequently slander men of action

abroad.[39] Magnus finds it hard to understand why advice from people other than the top officials has not been heeded in the past decades. But now (the passage referred to is taken from Eft.atj.ald., written before the debacle of 1807) all this, it is claimed, has changed: Magnus says that this procedure is not in accordance with the will of "our present merciful and wise government" which readily listens to the advice of wise men, judgements and arguments on everything by anybody, and which, for this paternalistic purpose, abolished the restrictions on the freedom of the press for everybody who wants to use it for the benefit and the honour of the country and the people.[40] Two other governmental measures that Magnus was particularly pleased about were the introduction of an organized postal service in the country and of justitskassen, a fund from which the expenses of the Althing were paid.[41]

In Eft.atj.ald. Magnus argues that in the course of the eighteenth century progress has not been least noticeable in the field of internal administration.[42] And in his "general observation of Iceland in the century" he answers in the affirmative the question whether or not the judicial system and the government has improved.[43] He likewise thinks that civil liberties and the freedom to choose employment (naeringsfrihed) has improved.[44] But this he qualifies extensively; the police system needs to be reorganized, so does the poor law; a regulation on adequate superintendance of the state institutions, minors and beggars, and other matters is

needed, The only prison in the country (built in the late eighteenth century) is unsatisfactory. Last, but not least, the salary of lay and ecclesiastical officials should be raised: as it is, their income is so low that they have to devote much time to other things such as farming - it does not help that sheriffs and bailiffs sometimes have to pay official expenses out of their own pockets.[45] Here it may be remarked that while the incomes of the officials varied greatly and the inflation of the war years, which was already severely felt by the time Magnus was writing, hit them hard, some officials - especially the sheriffs but also several parsons - managed to become rich by Icelandic standards.

Magnus's comments on individual officials are worth looking at. Of the stiftamtmenn he says that Ulrich Gyldenlove, Christian V's bastard son, was most outstanding.[46] Otto Manderup Rantzau (1750-68) is praised,[47] and so is Lauritz Andreas Thodal for his integrity.[48] It is said - with implied disapproval - of several of the Danish stiftamtmenn that they never actually came to Iceland. No comment is made on Olafur Stefansson, Magnus Stephensen's father. As for the landfogetar, Christian Drese's indecision and carelessness is mentioned.[49] Also noteworthy is what Magnus says of two prominent logmenn in the early eighteenth century. Pall Vidalin was described as a learned man, knowledgable of the old laws, and a renowned poet in his day, but otherwise a strange man and of dubious character.[50] Oddur Sigurdsson: "this man abused his fortune, and Fortune

in turn took revenge on him."[51] - These comments on individual personalities seem to a large extent to reflect popular opinion in Iceland.

(b) The economy

For obvious reasons Magnus can use his statistics most effectively in this field. In fact, his three tables in Isl.Att.Aarh. - of the population in 1804, of the economic resources, and of the overseas trade - form the basis of his argument in the general summary. Magnus's conclusions are that it is doubtful whether the material conditions of the nation have improved. His standard here is increased production and trade (the third key question in the general survey). The fourth key question - whether Iceland has gained greater prosperity and security against material want in the future, he feels compelled to answer tentatively in the negative. He seeks the reasons for the situation not only in national calamities but also in a misguided approach to farming and an excessive number of squatters. But he, like Hannes Finnsson, did not have any doubts about how to answer the vexing question: was Iceland really inhabitable?

As for arferdi, the weather in general, the harvests, fishing and so on - Magnus argues that the eighteenth century was bad in parts, but that previous centuries had been worse. This is an echo of Hannes Finnsson's argument in Mannf.hall. The reasons Magnus gives for famine in Iceland are: exceedingly severe winters and drift ice from Greenland, unsuccessful fishing,

erosion caused by sea and tidal waves as well as a serious loss of fishermen's lives, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, and epidemic diseases among people and animals alike.[52]

But Magnus seems to have thought that, basically, Icelandic society was bound to remain static; he welcomed innovations but only those which fitted in with the existing framework of society. It is in these terms that he interprets the eighteenth century.

Demography was a subject that interested Magnus. He asks: Does the population increase or decrease from century to century? What is its average level? What prevents its increase? Pointing out that during the last two centuries Nature (sic) has seldom allowed the population to rise above the 50,000 mark,[53] he doubts that Iceland can carry a great many more; he enumerates several reasons why more people could live in Iceland in the Commonwealth Age. To be sure, the number of farm labourers is not sufficient for the effective cultivation of the land (also, most of the squatters can hardly be regarded as labourers - they do more to impoverish than to support the population at large).[54]

Indeed, Magnus viewed the eighteenth century as a period of decline in farming. The quality of the land, he claimed, declined, and several attempts at introducing new methods and branches of farming - such as the growing of vegetables - were as a whole not successful; the theory of physiocracy made a greater impact on Iceland than its practice.

Magnus thinks that the country's natural resources have

not been utilized as they should. He is pleased with an increase in the catches of salmon and trout, mentions progress in seal-hunting, the eiderdown industry, and fox-hunting. But these are relatively minor things compared with the damage done by the scab disease which he refers to as a great epidemic that for twenty years destroyed Iceland's most important industry, sheep farming, and therewith the prosperity of the country.[55] It is noteworthy that Magnus does not discuss the Moduhardindi specifically in this connection. Himself an author of several essays on sheep farming, Magnus argues in Eft.at.j.ald. that the ewes have not been cared for well enough and therefore too many lambs have died prematurely. Magnus puts forward several other observations on farming. Twice in the century, in 1754 and in 1783, the farmers have raised their number of horses beyond reason. Extensive dairy farming is suitable only in certain regions; sheep farming will always be the basis of Ideland's prosperity. One of the reasons for the unhappy state of farming is decreasing self-sufficiency; in this respect Hunavatnssysla could serve as a model. It is necessary to have a depot in each sysla.[56]

As a whole Magnus was critical of the attempts to make fishing an independent - as opposed to subsidiary - industry; to break away from the traditional methods of fishing.[57] This applies to the use of the duggur - small fishing-vessels but nevertheless much bigger than the usual Icelandic boats - and the increase of fishing-gear. Long-lines with new and

better gear become "expensive and difficult" to get for the poor. The increase in the number of boats in some regions, e.g. Snaefellsnessysla, did not have altogether desirable results: people migrated to the coast in considerable numbers without being able to earn a livelihood there except in good years. In short, the hopes attached to the increase in fishing were not realistic.

On the other hand Magnus regarded the development of various industries and handicrafts - especially those connected with sheep farming - as part of the country's progress. It was fortunate, he argued, that spinning-wheels (rokkar) were reintroduced and largely replaced the spindles (snaeldur).[58]

Adverse conditions of trade were seen as one of the most serious checks on the economy. The island-woman's hair stands on end when she thinks of this.[59] The evils of the monopoly trade were mannifold. The system of set prices was disastrous to all; the fact that prices were more advantageous in the coastal regions than inland led to an undesirable development of society.[60] The Icelanders received low quality goods. No wonder that this caused apathy, idleness, and poverty. Of the individual trading companies, the Flaxen Merchants are attacked for ruining the Innrettingar - institutions aimed at the diversification of the economy, set up in the 1750s under the leadership of Skuli Magnusson (see Chapter 1) - and for being responsible for famine through its failure to import food stuffs in lean years. The import of inferior grain by the

General Commercial Company is also mentioned. Magnus says that the activities and the encroachments of the merchants as well as their libels on the Icelanders, and the latters' retorts, will be properly judged in the nineteenth century. Magnus refrained from fitting the monopoly trade into the context of mercantilism and Danish trade policy in general; it was only later in the nineteenth century when the struggle for increased autonomy had begun that the Icelanders began to investigate the monopoly trade in the context of the Danish rule of Iceland. In the national consciousness of the Icelanders the monopoly became perhaps the biggest single grievance against the Danes, which left its mark on Icelandic historiography.

In 1787 the Iceland trade was opened up to all Danish subjects. In Magnus's view this measure had both good and bad effects. It strengthened the country's economy, and made the prices of exports and imports more advantageous to the Icelanders than before. On the other hand, the prices were constantly going up, and this stimulated inflation. And the pattern of consumption has changed for the worse, resulting in excesses - a theme that we shall return to later. Magnus also describes people's initial hopes of the effect of the free trade on the market towns which were chartered in 1786: because of Iceland's natural conditions these hopes cannot be fulfilled. By 1807 there is no prospect that six market towns can flourish in the country. Reykjavik is declining; inflation is a more serious problem there than in any other town in the Danish Empire if

not in the whole of Europe. The prospects of its further growth are only limited and this will be dependent on a series of good or bad years. The town lacks a respectable bourgeois atmosphere (et vaerdigt Borgersind) and true culture.[61]

(c) Society and culture

Magnus's views on this subject are to a certain extent contradictory. While he resents the social change that took place in the second half of the eighteenth century he welcomes various cultural currents that are very difficult to dissociate from that social change. It seems as if Magnus's ideal was a new enlightened culture in a fairly static society.

In the previous section we have seen that Magnus regarded the migration to the seaboard as detrimental to society. The marriages of "lazy people and paupers" who went to live by the coast were undesirable.[62] The idleness of the coast-dwellers resulted in vices of many kinds and misfortunes, lausamennska (people not being in permanent employment), haggling and usury, inflation, wilfulness and obstinacy of domestic servants and "all the big vices that usually accompany the above-mentioned ... with the sheep much good fortune disappeared".[63] Magnus views the introduction of tea and coffee to the country and the increased consumption of sugar and syrup with some disapproval. Neither did he like the import of refined alcholic beverages; he had a constant objection to the consumption of "luxury goods". Magnus did not condemn the consumption of horse-flesh as a moral evil - a hot debating-point in the late eighteenth century

- but he thought that it had had a bad effect on society.[64] He resented the new "Danish" or French fashion in dress; he saw this as yet another example of vanity - people were ashamed of home-made clothing (knitted articles and homespun), the "natural costume" of the island woman's children.[65] We see again similarities between Magnus's views and those of Espolin. Among other undesirable eighteenth century developments he singled out passion for gambling and reluctance to part with money for the Church and other institutions.[66]

But, despite everything, there had been some progress in morals and manners. Morality has improved and so has spiritual freedom and tolerance.[67] Hardheartedness and foul arrogance have given way to more humane conduct and more gentle customs.[68] But this has to be qualified; some people, especially heldri menn such as sheriffs and clergymen, have displayed craft in dealings with other people instead of "worthy and frank" kindness and showed humiliating familiarity, also towards the rabble (illthydi). This is most harmful among the officials, who in this way lose the confidence and the respect of the public.

But Magnus is in no doubt about how to answer the question whether Iceland, with regard to enlightenment or culture, has taken important steps forwards or backwards. "... it is with the greatest surprise that one realizes the gigantic steps forward that it (i.e. the country's culture) has taken in the eighteenth century, far ahead of any previous century, and one can rejoice in the hope that the century that has just begun

will not witness less progress."[69] Magnus argues that contemporary literature is of the same standard as medieval literature, that Eggert Olafsson and hymnographer Hallgrimur Petursson (1614-1684) were comparable with the medieval writers. The sagnaskemmtun is not desirable if it means that only old manuscripts are read; but people like even "the most tasteless and most senseless fables" better than constructive contemporary works.[70] The rimur, adventures, and two-part song are relics that an enlightened nation might as well do away with. But the Icelanders can be proud of their tradition of keeping their linguistic heritage; the language must, however, be allowed to develop naturally; Magnus did not like antiquated modes of expression.

As for theology and the practice of the Christian religion, progress has been made since the end of the seventeenth century, let alone since the Middle Ages. And one of the most pleasant developments in the eighteenth century is the retreat of superstition and the end of excommunications, conjuring, and burning of witches.[71]

In the light of Magnus's career it is interesting to investigate what he has to say about learned societies and book publication.[72] On the printing press at Holar, which eventually, much to the Northerners' discontent, was merged with the printing press of the Landsuppfraedingarfelag, Magnus says that it printed several useful and good books, but even more collections of bad hymns and secular poems, lacking in taste, and sermons and

prayers of low quality. He explained the decline of the Laerdomslistafelag after Jon Eiriksson's death by the ineptitude of the young students who led it.

(ii) Denmark and Iceland in the periodicals

Both Minn.tid. and Klp. have sections on affairs in Denmark and Iceland. The Danish sections are structurally similar to the accounts of other countries, but rather more detailed, with more non-political matter. These sections are pervaded by love of the monarchy and the Danish state.

The Icelandic sections in both periodicals, however, follow closely the traditional annalistic pattern of the selection of news; there are sections on the forces of nature, government, and culture, and there are obituaries. However, personal and regional subjects are not given extensive coverage. And we must remember what Magnus said in Isl.Att.Aarh.: that the sections on Iceland in Minn.tid. could be used as material for a history of Iceland in the nineteenth century. The passage is worth paraphrasing in full: This magazine gives, right from the beginning of 1795 an historical survey, based on various journals, of the most memorable events inside and outside Iceland, but especially everything physical-historical (physico-historisk) as well as economic-political concerning this country, with corresponding treatises and documents. If the publication of the magazine can continue it would for a future historian of Iceland be a not unimportant contribution to a better obituary on the nineteenth century than Magnus himself has been able to

compile on the eighteenth.[73]

Investigating the subject-matter of the two periodicals more closely one finds that the interpretation is in much the same vein as in the work on the eighteenth century. Magnus deals with, for instance, the value for society of farming and fishing,[74] and life by the sea-side in winter.[75] However, in the Klausturpostur period he seems to take a more favourable view, than before, of innovations in fishing.[76]

The readers are given a few glimpses into the making of the periodicals. In Minn.tid. there is a complaint of lack of news from the Holar diocese.[77] On another occasion he asks his readers for news from other parts of the country.[78] Magnus says he publishes decrees because the public needs to know about these things;[79] the favourable reception by the public is a reward for the pains he took in selecting and writing the material. Magnus clearly regarded both Minn.tid. and Klp. as popular publications; and even though he did not see his sections on Iceland as low-level journalism (see above) this may help to explain why he chose the traditional unsophisticated form of presentation.

REFERENCES

1 Olafur Palmason, Magnus Stephensen og bokmenntastarfsemi hans (University of Iceland Mag. Art. Thesis), 1963.

2 See ibid.

3 Thorkell Johannesson, "Magnus Stephensen", Lydir og landshagir, Reykjavik, pp.106-145.

4 "Thessi tilraun min til ad gefa minum kaeru landsmonnum litla vitneskju um markverda tilburdi og breytingar i kringum oss a vorum dogum og timum."

5 "...laera thar af ad thekkja Guds dasamlegu stjorn vors heims, fraedast, betrast og smam saman segja skilid vid oll hjatruar og hleypidoma yfirrad, sem of lengi hafa hnekkt morgum framfarar vidburdum og loflegum fyrirtaekjum a voru landi."

6 "Godfusa lesara bid eg vel ad virda thessa og serhverja adra tilraun mina til almenns frodleiks og uppbyggingar! af hinum oska og vaenti eg thviumliks einskis."

7 Olafur Palmason, op.cit.

8 Eft.atj.ald. p.XVIII "...til frodleiks og skemmtunar theim londum minum, er thau vilja thar til nyta."; "til nidurkaefingar hjatruar og fordoma flokkadratta og eydileggjandi osamlyndis, sem eru sidada menn midur saemandi."

9 Minn.tid.I,i, p.2. "Thessir tilburdir eru Islendingum sem bending Guds handar."

10 ibid. p.75. "...gudleg forsjon og mildi letu vizku og fridsemi svo rikja i hjarta vors landsfodur."

11 ibid. p.237

12 Minn.tid.I,ii, the section on Iceland.

13 "Ofur margt er thad merkilegt tilfallid a umlidnu tidindaari fra vordogum 1797, sem sannfaera megi oss fafroda menn um Guds fodurlegu stjorn vors heims, ja, sannfaera um, ad jafnvel ottalegustu tilburdir og fyrirtaeki manna mega undir hans stjorn verda medolin til ometanlegrar fullkomnunar og farsaeldar. Ver skulum thvi med virdingu

ihuga hans visa tilgang med hlutanna byltingar, en ei dirfast med favisum hleypidomum ad hallmaela theim og efast um theirra farsaelu afleidingar ad lokunum til hins bezta. Tidindaarsins tilfelli gefa oss og miklu meiri orsok til ad fagna flestum theirra en hryggjast, en thott sorg hljoti einatt gledinni sam_ferda ad verda og hvortveggja nefnast megi jafnnaud_synlegt monnum til eigin reynslu, framfarar and rettnefnds fagnadar i lifinu."

14 "..su 18da old gaf oss minnisstaed merki um Guds dasomu stjornun vors heims og gaezku vid oss, kenndi oss ad kannast vid hvorutveggja...benti til ad laera og ihuga sitthvad annad."

15 Eft.atj.ald. p.646

16 Klp. IX, 1826, p.1f. "...ma vekja i salu hans lifandi vidurkenningu um dasamlega stjorn alvisrar, godrar og mattugrar forsjonar yfir vorum heimi sem odrum, um framfarir thessa smam saman til ae meiri fullkomnunar og vaxandi heilla og um afleidingu gods jafnan af illu, sem ver, eftir thungbaerri stundarreynslu og fljotfaerum hleypidomum,svo nefnum. Vid tha rannsokn leidumst ver - jafnvel nu strax i lok thessarar aldar fyrsta fjordungs - fra villu og rangdaemi um edli, tilgang og afleidingar allmargra hans yfrid merkilegu til_burda, tho framtidinni enn tha se geymt ad rada ur morgum og lysa theim enn vissar, en vid voknum upp, rett sem af draumi, til ad undrast og prisa Forsjonarinnar visu stjorn, mitt i ollum mannlegs lifs iskyggilegustu byltingum. Sa umlidni aldarfjordungur er thvi thess verdugur, ad ver yfirlitum fljotlega hans merkistilfelli nokkur a ny og yfirvegum, hverra helzt oss adur myrku afleidingar nu virdast megi sem thegar radin, en hverra enn tha vera oradin gata."

17 ibid. p.7. "...ver gloggt faum sed og vidurkennt med lotningu, ad thvilikir oroa- og umbyltingatimar seu a stundum jafnhollir og naudsynlegir vorri jordu til hreinsunar og betrunar thess pestraena lofts, sem svo vida adur gjorspillt hafdi morgum heims stjornum, sykt thaer og afmyndad, en til laekninga thar

af leiddra stor_meina yfir thjodir og lond, eins og nokkurn tima fellibyljir og ovedur, feikilegar eldingar, jardeldar og fjallagos, brennur og landskjalftar eda mannfall af hardretti og drepsottum vid natturunnar sjalfkrafa gang og umbrot eftir radstofun theirrar visu og godu Forsjonar, eru af ollum hyggnum og upplystum monnum thekkt og vidurkennd ad vera velgjorningar Guds i natturunni til heilla og framfara vorum heimi."

18 ibid. p.13f. "... til thess ad vidretta Frankarikis hnignandi stjorn, riki og matt, vard samt af hans merkilegu aevitilfellum og seinni fyrirtaekjum ljos vottur thess, ad Forsjonin hafdi kjorid thennan fyrirtaks gafada framkvaemdarmann til nyrra stor-umbyltinga baedi i Frankariki og um alla Nordur- og meiri hluta Vesturalfu heims med hinna margvislegu afleidingum til thessara framfara."

19 ibid. p.30. "...um tyftana hollustu og verkanir."

20 ibid. p.29

21 Klp. VII, 1824, p.43. "Thar synist su skammvinna stjornarbylting vera af Forsjoninni valin sem medal eins og byltingarnar a Spani vid Napoleons herfarir i baedi thessi riki til ad utvega Sudur-Ameriku sjalfstjornar frelsi eins og morg onnur umbrot og enn yfir vofandi i Norduralfunni til ad auka med blomgun, sidun og farsaeld thessarar langthjokudu heimsalfu."

22 Klp. IX, 1826, p.15. "...hvilikt stig mannkynsins framfara i upplysingu var ekki thar vid afram farid, tho thetta um hrid kostadi margra lif."

23 Klp. III, 1820, p.195.

24 Minn.tid. I, p.2

25 Klp.III, 1820, p.195

26 Minn.tid. II, p.80. "Ovandari er eftirleikurinn."

27 Minn.tid. I, p.109. "Adgaetandi er, ad tho ad stodugum og aevarandi vinskap se heitid thjoda a milli, syna tho daemin, ad thar med er ekki meint lengri vinatta eda fridur en thar [illegible] til thaer finna ser hentugra ad brjota hann aftur."

28 Minn.tid. I,ii, p.239

29 ibid. p.130. "Svo tregt gengur thvi lidanda mannkyni ad na retti sinum mot voldugum raeningjum."

30 Klp. III, 1820, p.79. "Ad deyja svo aerusamlega er veglegt og einungis godmennum unnt! ad myrda thvilika danumenn saklausa ... eru svo aerulaus landrad, ad veraldar-sagan seint faer thau naegri sman brennimerkt."

31 Minn.tid. II,i, p.57. "Oskandi vaeri, ad Frankariki innlegdi ser nyja forthenustu hja mannkyninu med thvi ad lata nu gjora enda a theirra skammarlegu skattgyldu."

32 ibid. p.4, p.164

33 Eft.atj.ald. p.820. "Yfirvold min styra mer nu framar en adur."

34 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.426

35 ibid. p.3

36 Eft.atj.ald. p.543

37 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.311

38 See Eft.atj.ald. p.812

39 ibid. p.811

40 ibid. Nidurlag med yfirliti aldarinnar

41 ibid.pp.573-9

42 ibid. p.812

43 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.426

44 ibid. p.428

45 ibid. p.427

46 Eft.atj.ald. p.597

47 ibid. p.599

48 ibid. p.600

49 ibid. p.615

50 Isl.Att. Aarh. p.366f

51 ibid. p.368. "...af denne Mand blev Lykken meget misbruget, hvorfor den og selv haevnede sig paa ham."

52 ibid. p.16

53 Eft.atj.ald. p.268

54 ibid. p.271

55 ibid. p.68

56 The section "Penings- og kvikfjarraekt, fjarbetran, fjarpest, etc.", Eft.atj.ald. pp.511-521

57 The section "Fiskiveidar alls hattar", ibid. pp.521-32

58 ibid. p.537

59 ibid. p.559. The account of Magnus's discussion of trade is mainly based on the section "Kaupverzlunarform og breytingar", ibid. pp.559-562.

60 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.308

61 ibid. p.309ff

62 Eft.atj.ald. p.646

63 ibid. p.519, p.817ff

64 ibid. p.514

65 ibid. p.519

66 ibid. p.558f

67 ibid. p.619, p.632

68 ibid. p.800

69 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.240f. "... vil man dog med hoi Forundring kunne erfare de virkeligen store Kjaempeskridt, med hvilke den i det Attende Aarhundrede, er der gaaet fremad, og fryde sig vid Haabet, at det nysbegyndte vil ikke mindre befordre dens videre Forskridt."

70 ibid. p.235

71 Eft.atj.ald. p.821

72 ibid. pp.762-70

73 Isl.Att.Aarh. p.161

74 Klp. I, 1818, p.87

75 ibid. p.156

76 ibid. p.67

77 Minn.tid. I, p.275

78 Klp. I, 1818, p.48

79 ibid. p.54

CHAPTER 11

OTHER HISTORIANS

(1) Three contemporaries of Espolin's

Introductory remarks

In this section I propose to deal with three historians who were contemporaries of Espolin's even though two of them were considerably older than he was and one considerably younger. These men have one thing in common: they were all closely connected with Espolin - being his father (Jon Jakobsson), his uncle (Halldor Jakobsson), and his friend and pupil (Gisli Konrádsson) - and a study of their works may perhaps enable one to see Espolin's works in perspective. This section is intended to be a contribution to the study of Espolin as well as being a study of the three men as historians per se.

Some generalizations concerning these men might be attempted. There are certain parallels between the careers of the two brothers, Halldor and Jon: they were both educated in law at Copenhagen University and went on to become sheriffs; for both of them the writing of history was undertaken as a hobby during the relatively few leisure hours which a troublesome occupation offered. Jon wrote more in the folk tradition, and his interest in genealogy was more marked; Halldor apparently had a more thorough knowledge of the historical literature of the outside world, and unlike his brother did not deal exclusively with the history of Iceland. Gisli Konradsson, on the other hand, was largely self-educated - he learned Danish only at the age of forty - being

one of the common people, earning his living, during the period under survey here, from farming and fishing. While not maintaining that he was a "worse" historian than either Halldor or Jon his historical writings are much more parochial than those of Halldor in particular. And Gisli is different in that one historian in particular was his model and inspiration: that is, Jon Espolin.

Jon Jakobsson

Jon has been well described by his son, Jon Espolin, in his autobiography (see Chapter 3) and in Arb.Isl., and there are various sources available which throw light on his career as an official. Jon, the son of Jakob Eiriksson and Gudrun Jonsdottir, was born at Budir, Snaefellsnessysla, in 1738. The family was wealthy and Jon went to grammar school at Skalholt where he graduated in 1760 and then to Copenhagen where he studied law at the university. After his return to Iceland he became sheriff of Eyjafjardarssysla; a post which he held until his death in 1808. Jon was thought to be an efficient administrator and became prosperous during his sheriffdom but his relations with his superior, the amtmadur, his stepson Stefan Thorarinsson, were somewhat strained.

Espolin describes his father as a strict disciplinarian, lacking in warmth. His domestic lifewas probably not very happy and he was inclined to excessive drinking at home for the best part of his life. On the other hand he was respected and rather popular among the population at large. Espolin emphasizes his

learning; he says that he had studied many subjects, was knowledgable about medicine and chemistry and loved all learned men. In particular, Espolin stresses his father's knowledge of history, which among other things, he says, is testified by the paints he took in compiling the lives of the sheriffs in Northern Iceland. Indeed, at least two examination certificates of Jon's are still extant:[1] that of the final examination at Skalholt grammar school and his examen philosophicum at Copenhagen University where he was examined in 14 and 12 subjects, respectively. These certificates show that Jon was a successful student; his best subjects seem to have been physics and ethics, history was not among those. Little is known about the teaching of history at Copenhagen University at this time; Hubner, the famous historian, was professor of history, while it seems that Molman lectured on the subject. It is known that at the end of his life Jon possessed several books on history, but when he attained them is not clear.[2]

Indeed, Jon seems to have had a flair for the natural sciences; probably this interest was stimulated by the current trend of Enlightenment thought. It is interesting to notice[3] that Jon's works include a treatise, Um aerologiu eda vedrattufar, on meteorology. It appears that Jon sent it to Videnskabernes Selskab in Copenhagen, but did not receive a reply. But Andreas Holt asked him to continue this work - which was essentially an annal dealing with the weather. Jon stated that he had continued this for

"his parish and county". But he said that astronomical observations were lacking because he had never studied the subject, and therefore he asked to be instructed in mathematics.

(i) The reasons why Jon wrote; his idea of history

None of Jon's works was printed in his own lifetime except the obituary of Sveinn Solvason (Copenhagen 1791); he did not generally write with an eye to printing. For him writing was a pleasant leisure-time activity; he wrote mainly out of love of learning and for intellectual satisfaction.

I have not found much evidence about Jon's idea of history. There are, however, two places where he discusses his historical writings subjectively. There is a preface to Syslumannaaevir i Nordlendingafjordungi in which Jon plays down his erudition; there may be an element of false modesty in this, but this is difficult to evaluate. There are certain things, he says, that he leaves to those who are more knowledgable of the history of the fatherland to relate. Bishop Hannes Finnsson is best qualified to provide information about this. His learning as well as that of his ancestors is praised, and the excellency of his private library and manuscript collection is pointed out. This is all phrased in the high-flown language of the age. Bearing in mind what Jon said about his motives for writing the "aerologia" - that he did it for his parish and county - and that most of Jon's historical works were in one way or another connected with the North of Iceland one might deduce that he was particularly anxious to preserve the memory of events there,

but did not regard his contribution as outstandingly significant.

The MS.Lbs.823,4to., which includes a fragment of an annal, 1742-1794, has an epilogue in which Jon states his opinion of what the ideal annal should be like - the "most constructive" annals as he put it. The words should be arranged beautifully and lucidly; the style should be neat and concise, according to the best spelling rules, all affectation should be avoided. A couple of Latin proverbs are used to bring this point home.

As for the subject-matter of the annals, Jon divides this into eight categories. As far as I know, he is the only Icelandic annalist who has stated the basic pattern of annalistic writing, and therefore this section is of special significance. Roughly, Jon's categorization is as follows: first, the characterization of the seasons, with special regard to the weather, the keeping of the livestock, the hay crop, fishing all over the country. Second, the physical state of the population, diseases etc., and the death of well-known people. Thirdly, extraordinary instances - unusual deaths, unusual births, the loss of ships etc. Fourthly, appointment to offices in the country, cultural matters, the establishment of various institutions. Fifthly, trade, especially terms of trade after 1787. Sixthly, a brief necrology dealing with "the oldest energetic people (dugnadarfolk) and good men". Seventhly, a brief account of overseas news - reliable news only. Eighthly, an account of the most important ordinances concerning Iceland.

(ii) Jon's individual works

(a) Annals

The compilation of Jon's annals covers the period from 1700 to 1801; it seems as if he wrote more than one annal and perhaps sometimes covered the same year twice.

Those annals which I have investigated follow the traditional pattern as outlined by Jon himself (see above). The annals are not very extensive, at least if compared with those of his son, Espolin. The length of the whole is in the region of 40,000 works. It is noticeable that Jon includes a considerable amount of local or regional information. He did not criticize "superstitious" beliefs to the same extent as his son did. Jon's annals were no doubt used by Espolin when he compiled his annals; indeed there are additions by Espolin to his father's work and the account of the post-1789 period are to a considerable extent Espolin's work. One significant aspect of Jon's annals is that they contain a foreign section: this was common in the earlier days of annalistic writing in Iceland, but not in his own time.

In Specification yfir sma skrif og anecdoten syslumanns Jons Jakobssonar 1759-1800 - a bibliography of Jon's work compiled by himself - he has this to say about his annalistic works: he has collected, as far as it was possible to do so veraciously, material on the most important events of this century on the basis of dependable learned works and the writings of reliable honourable men etc. as well as various periodical publications.

In a footnote Jon points out that he does not know any comparable survey of the eighteenth century, but the most recent and most comprehensive news survey is that of Magnus Stephensen.

(b) Syslumannaaevir i Nordlendingafjordungi (The Lives of the Sheriffs in the North)

Like Espolin's annals this work exists in various manuscripts. It is a biographical account of the lives of the sheriffs in the four counties that comprised the Northern quarter of Iceland: Hunavatnssysla, Skagafjardarsysla (Hegranesthing), Eyjafjardarsysla (Vadlathing), Thingeyjarsysla. There is an appendix by Espolin. There is also a brief list of the sheriffs of Mulasysla.[3]

Various sources are cited in the text such as Skardsarannall,[3a] Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae, Mannf.hall., (52),[4] the "knowledgable genealogist" Jon Helgason;[5] various court decisions including one found in the Arnamagnean collection, a document from 1773; Det kongelige Videnskabs Selskabs Skrifter, Aldarhattur 18. aldar.

It is obvious that Jon wanted to describe the life of each individual sheriff as fully as possible, usually in an annalistic form. Their families are traced (moreover most of Espolin's observations and additions are of genealogical nature) and value judgements passed on them. But Jon also tried to see the institution of sheriffdom in perspective; in the introduction he traces its development back to its establishment in the late thirteenth century and points out that in Catholic times

hofudsmenn and even bishops were granted the office of sheriff. He regrets the lack of source material for the pre-Reformation period, e.g. in the introduction to the section on Hunavatnssysla, but he says he nevertheless wants to mention everyone who certainly has held the post of sheriff in Hunavatnssysla as he did whendealing with other counties.

Further, it is noteworthy that the section on Vadlathing (Eyjafjardarsysla) includes a historiographical account of the origins and use of runes.

(c) Um folksfjolda a Islandi (On the Population of Iceland)

This is a very brief treatise, about 10 pages in MS. It is an answer to a letter that Sveinn Solvason wrote to Jon on the subject. In his treatise, Jon attempts to answer two questions: first, whether Iceland has previously been more populous than it is at the present day; second, if this is found to be the case, what reasons are there for the decline in population? Jon answers the first question in the affirmative, using for instance lists of farmers, the number of desert farms, and references to large gatherings of people in the Commonwealth Age as evidence. He attributes the population decline to epidemics such as Bubonic Plague and smallpox, the effect of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, emigration (a factor hardly ever mentioned in discussions of the Icelandic demography in these days), unfavourable terms of trade under the monopoly system, and frequent famine which resulted from various of these factors. The essay is orderly arranged and the argument is

lucid, but no attempt is made at establishing a definite demographic pattern; in that respect the approach is different from Hannes Finnssen's Mannf.hall. although certain similarities can be found.

(d) Um prentverksbyrjun a Nordurlondum og framhald her a Islandi (On the Beginning of Printing in Scandinavia and Its Continuation in Iceland).

This is a short essay, 32 pages in MS., in effect a short history of printing in Iceland. As there was only one printing press in the country for over two centuries and that one was kept at Hólar most of the time (just for a short period at Skalholt) it was only natural that Jon traced the story in terms of individual bishops and publications during each bishop's term of office.

This is a fairly sophisticated essay; it is extensively documented in a great number of footnotes. The sources include both Icelandic and foreign works; of the Icelandic sources Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae is perhaps most important. Among the foreign sources we can mention Chr.Matthiaei Theatrum historicum and other German works as well as books by Ole Worm, Fr. Suhm, and Seichendorph.

(e) Samanburdur hinna staerstu Norduralfunnar magtarmanna (A Comparative Study of the Most Powerful Rulers in Europe)

The princes Jon chose for this comparative study are Peter the Great, Frederick the Great, and Charles XII - he wanted to compare these with other great kings "among whom I do not know

from history (fra sogunum) anyone greater or more respectable than King Christian IV of Denmark".[5a] His patriotism as a subject of the Danish Crown is obvious in this.

(f) Stutt agrip um kristinn rett Islendinga (A Short Treatise on Icelandic Canon Law)

This essay falls into two parts; the first one (11 chapters) covering the period until the Reformation; the second one (4 chapters) deals with the post-Reformation period.

This is a factual, rather than an analytical, account: an enumeration of the most important stages in ecclesiastical legislation, from the ecclesiastical law of Thorgeir Ljosvetningodi and King Olafur Tryggrason onwards. The most important statutes are described as well as regulations established by individual bishops.

Jon does not give his sources for this essay, but it seems likely that he used Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae as well as some Icelandic medieval works.

(g) Eitt ord um tiund og tiundargjold (A Word (sic) on the Tithe and Its Payment)

This essay is basically a legal tract, not an historical one. It was written in order to throw light on a practical contemporary problem: (a) how the tithe should generally be paid; (b) how it should be paid in connection with paupers and payment of debt.

However, the subject is treated from a semi-historical point of view; the tithe was installed in Iceland in 1096 and

had a very important function in the legal, ecclesiastical and economic history of Iceland: therefore it is impossible to explain its function in Jon's day except in historical perspective.

The sources have not been traced.

(h) Om Sagefaldet (in Danish - On Judicial Proceedings)

This very brief essay - only 5 pages in MS. - is just that: an account of the development of Icelandic law since the establishment of the **storidomur** in the late sixteenth century (see Chapter 5).

It is also possible that Jon wrote a Logsogumannatal (a list of the logsogumenn in Iceland, see glossary) and a Klaustratal, a list of the Icelandic monasteries and nunneries.

Halldor Jakobsson

Halldor Jakobsson, Jon Jakobsson's brother, was born at Budir, in 1735. He graduated from Skalholt grammar school in 1753 and went then to Copenhagen University where he received a degree in law in 1756. He was sheriff of Strandasysla from 1758-1788 when he was dismissed after a turbulent career; Halldor was a man of volcanic temperament, a heavy drinker and inclined to be violent. After his dismissal he continued to live in the North and the Northwest.

Like his brother, Halldor no doubt studied history at Skalholt grammar school and probably also at University, for the examen philosophicum. I have found only limited evidence about Halldor's career as a student and his intellectual

pursuits in general, but in a short autobiographical account (Lbs.519,4to.), he says that when he came to University Professor J. Kall the Older became his private teacher. He also says that at this stage it occurred to him to move to Germany.

Halldor was a man of wide interests and knowledgable in many fields. Apart from history he wrote fiction (Armanns saga, (Hrappsey 1782); Sagan af Gongu - Hrolfi (Leirargardar 1804)), an obituary of Sheriff Bjarni Halldorsson (Copenhagen 1797), essays in the Enlightenment tradition on fishing and trade (Lbs.519,4to.), an essay on the names of the months in Latin and Hebrew (Lbs.798,4to.), the firths and peninsulas in Iceland (ibid.) and he edited a late medieval poem, Hattalykill by Loftur Guttormsson (Copenhagen 1793).

I would suggest that as an historian Halldor can in many ways be compared with Espolin; he certainly did not work on the same lines as his brother, Jon, and other historians who were moulded in the tradition of folk history. Halldor was more of an Enlightenment historian; this is seen in his choice of subjects and his approach to them.

(i) Halldor's idea of history and method of presentation

I am inclined to believe that Halldor wrote both for his own intellectual satisfaction and also in order to educate his countrymen. His prefaces to Chronologiae Tentamen...(Chron.Tent.) and Persakronikur (Persakr.) throw some light on his motives for writing. In the dedication of Chron.Tent. he says "I wish that this little work could serve to improve the learning of

my dear countrymen and be of desirable uses to them".[6] In the preface to the book he says that it would take too long to enumerate all the benefits that can be derived from the reading and knowledge of sacred and profane histories in earlier and more recent times; so many well learned men have done so previously that such an argument would be superfluous. He quotes Cicero: Vere igitur historia est testis temporum,lux veritatis, vita memoriae, magistra vitae, nuncia vetustatis. Then Halldor refers to the Danish professor Anchersen in Det Chronologiske Compendium (Copenhagen 1754): "Without chronology history is blind in its right eye (the other is geography) and man is constantly a child. In my opinion this testimony and many others are a sufficient excuse for the publication of this small chronological specimen".[6a]

In the preface to Persakr. it is evident that Halldor thought that he was doing the Icelandic nation a service by translating and adapting Herodotus because to his knowledge nothing had been written on Herodotus's subject before - the Persian history written in Icelandic so far seemed to be an extract of Justinus. Halldor adds that he has in mind, if God grants him time to do so, a continuation of his history of the Persian kings down to the days of Alexander the Great (which he duly wrote). But his wish to fill a gap in Icelandic historical literature was only one reason why Halldor wanted to translate Herodotus into Icelandic, or as he strikingly put it, bringing in the element of personal satisfaction, why he chose Herodotus for his entertain-

ment rather than other historians. The other reasons were that Herodotus is one of the oldest of the pagan historians - his account begins roughly at the time when the Book of Kings ends - and that he is one of the most reliable ancient historians, to a certain extent describing matters that he had seen or heard himself. "Unusual and instructive adventures are found here, which deserve the attention of beginners."[7]

The notion that the Icelandic nation was done a service by rendering certain works into Icelandic is also found in Agrip af nokkurra konunga - og keisaraaevum.[8] There Halldor says that even though he knew that there existed in Icelandic a translation of the history of the renowned Emperor Constantine the Great he nevertheless did not want to pass him over. The important role of Constantine in history coupled with the imperfection of the earlier work justified the effort.

There was also a specific purpose behind the writing of Fuldstaendige Efterretninger... (Fuldst.Eft.), namely to reveal the truth about the eruptions of Hekla and refute false theories concerning the birth of Iceland, that it emerged out of the sea as a result of volcanic activity. He regarded this matter as important enough to justify the printing of the essay. We may perhaps interpret as false modesty his words in the preface that his insignificant work would without doubt be subjected to severe criticism, among other things because of what some people would see as the insignificance of the material.

We have already observed that Halldor saw Herodotus's

reliability as one of the major virtues of his work and also that his was to a certain extent an eye-witness account. In Chron.Tent. this concern for reliable sources is also evident. Halldor took the Bible at face value as an historical source; apparently the teachings of the Enlightenment did not influence him strongly enough to shake his orthodox belief in the infallibility and the chronology of Holy Writ. But Halldor passed value judgements on some of the many historians he referred to as sources. Xenophon wrote "instructive histories"; he and Thucydides can be regarded as reliable because they had first-hand knowledge of their subjects; Diodorus Siculus wrote "a good history"; Livy is one of the most remarkable of all the ancient historians because his writings are characterized by reliability (truskapur) and sincerity.

There are also several instances of Halldor's speculating about historical problems where his sources were not in agreement.[9] There is, he claimed, a curious discrepancy between the accounts of the origins of the Assyrian state; many learned men maintain that judges did not reign in Israel in succession;[10] there is disagreement about the date of the invention of powder;[11] it is doubted that Black Death came to Iceland in 1402.[12] When Halldor enumerates his sources in Fuldst.Eft. he mentions that he compared the account in Flateyjarbok with the works of three other annalists, and sometimes he mentions variations in the dating of the same event (i.e. volcanic eruptions).

As for Halldor's method of presentation, his principle was

to write lucidly so that his works could be enjoyed by the ordinary reader. He describes his attitude in the preface to Persakr. He regards it as more important to keep the exact meaning of the original text than to keep the Latin style. He has not tried very much to use embellished Icelandic style, but has preferred everyday language which everybody understands. He has, generally speaking, refrained from using phrases taken from foreign languages so that this (work) could be understood by as many as possible; singing (sic) at the end the old line Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile Dulci. Further, the full title of Chron.Tent. includes a mention of its being written in everyday language, which is significant.

In the preface to Fuldst.Eft. Halldor mentions "Stilens Uziirlighed" (i.e. the awkwardness of style) as one of the grounds on which his work could be criticized. What was said above about another remark in the same preface may be applicable here: that this was an instance of false modesty, but it is also possible to see the remark as an expression of Halldor's view that elegance in style was not what mattered most in writing.

In the preface to Persakr. (Herodotus's part in them) Halldor describes his principles in adapting a foreign historical work to Icelandic and at the same time expresses his views on the didactic purpose of history and source criticism. The length of this extract, Halldor says, is only about one quarter of Herodotus's original work; to translate it word for word seemed unnecessary to him because it contained a great amount of material

which is both insignificant and not instructive to anyone and which is presented in a more reliable and entertaining form in other books; moreover, he did not have the necessary means of checking a full-length version. The extract is based on a Latin version made by Contrad Heresbachio is 1526; Halldor says that it did not matter that he did not have the Greek original at his disposal; this would have made no difference. He chose to keep personal names and geographical terms (cities and countries) in their original form; in the case of the latter there have been physical changes or new names have been adopted so he thought it was futile to try to bring the geographical terminology up to date.

(ii) Individual works

(a) Fuldstaendige Efterretninger om de udi Island ildsprudende Bierge, deres Beliggende og de Virkninger som ved Jord-Brandene paa adskillige Tider ere foraarsagede (in Danish) (A Comprehensive Account of Volcanoes in Iceland, their Location and the Effects of the Eruptions at Various Times)

This essay was printed in Copenhagen in 1757; it is dedicated to the Count of Rantzau. It is 88 pages plus an introduction.

The essay falls into two parts. The first is of geographical-geological character, describing seventeen volcanoes and volcanic regions in Iceland. The second part is historical: a chronological account of volcanic eruptions in Iceland, from the Age of Settlement to the eruption of Katla in 1755. Various

sources are used such as The Book of Settlements, Flateyjarbok, Skardsarannall and other annals, and descriptions of seventeenth and eighteenth century eruptions by various authors (Katla 1625 - Klausturhaldari Thorsteinn Magnusson; Hekla 1693 - Bishop Thordur Thorlaksson; Krafla 1724 - Logmadur Benedikt Thorsteinsson; Katla 1727 - Klausturhaldari Einar Halfdanarson). It seems that the Hekla eruptions of 1673 and the Katla one in 1755 are described most fully.

(b) Chronologiae Tentamen edur Timatals Registurs Agrip fra Upphafi allra Skapadra hluta, til vorra Daga. I hiaverkum Ur ymsum Sagna-Meistara Skrifum a hvors Dags Islendsku Samanlesid af Halldore Jacobssyne. Hrappsey 1781. (C.T. or A Chronological Extract from the Creation of the World to the Present. Compiled in Leisure Hours from the Works of the Various Historians by Halldor Jakobsson).

This work is a chronological account of world history; ending in 1752, but according to the preface Halldor, writing in 1781, intended to continue this work down to the present. According to his calculations the world had been in existence for 5750 years, which is a difference of two years compared with "our almanacs", i.e. the usual chronology.

The work is divided into ten chapters, each covering a fixed period. The first, from the Creation to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt; second, to the end of the captivity; third, to the death of Darius Codommanus; fourth, to Augustus's assuming absolute power in Rome; fifth, to the

ascension of Constantine the Great, sixth, to the Age of Charlemagne; seventh, to Otto the First; eighth, to the days of Conrad the Third; ninth, to the ascension of King Valdemar III of Denmark; tenth, to the beginnings of the Reformation; eleventh, to 1652; twelfth, to 1752.

Chron.Tent. is essentially an annal. The years in which individual events took place are put on the left-hand margin; auctores, ie. the historians used as sources, on the right-hand margin. There are also some insertions (copied from various histories for instruction), printed in a small type, which deal with the same events as those described in the larger type, or diversions from the main themes. I do not know whether there was a direct model for Chron.Tent. or whether Halldor actually used all the sources he referred to himself. I do not know any work, in Danish or any other language, that could have been used as a direct model, but then it may seem doubtful that Halldor actually possessed or had read all the 120 or so foreign historical works (apart from the Icelandic ones) that he refers to as sources. Only 26 books are enumerated in the list of his property compiled after his death.[12a] But I think that the second possibility is more likely - even if Halldor had not read all those books thoroughly he was probably at least personally acquainted with most if not all of the works he mentioned.

The Bible was a source on which the first two chapters were largely based; then all the most important classical his-

torians are mentioned (as well as some classical writers who cannot be classified as historians) and a number of medieval historians including several of the best known: Eusebius, Einhard, Widukind, Sigebertus, Otto of Freisingen, Saxo Grammaticus, Gregory of Tours, Philip Commines, Froissart, Bede, and Jordanes. Further, Polydore Vergil is referred to as well as Camden and Buchanus. The works of the continental historians on the post-Reformation period are not only in Latin, but also in the modern European languages, Danish, German, and possibly English and Swedish. If Halldor actually knew English he was one of the few Icelanders to do so. But curiously enough no work in French is quoted. The continental works, published after the Reformation, that are referred to are: Chronologia by D. Chythraeus (Rostock 1573); Joh.Cluverii Historiae totius mundi; Theatrum Historicum by Christian Mathiaeus; Engelsk Universal History, 21; Einleitung zur Universal-Historie by Frejer; Historia Universalis by Holberg and his History of Denmark; Politisk Historie by Hubner (3 vols.), a table at the back of Swedish history by Johannes Loccenius; the history of the Norwegian kings by Jonas Ramus; books by Langebek and Suhm.

The most important events in Icelandic history are put into this chronological account. Halldor's sources for Icelandic history are medieval works (including the Sagas of Icelanders), annals and what Halldor calls gamlar fraedibaekur, i.e. "old books of knowledge", as well as Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae.

Chron.Tent. is for the most part the history of princes and wars. As it deals with the whole course of world history in brief space nothing is treated comprehensively. The insertions in small type deal mainly with chronological questions.

But despite the brevity of the work and its factuality, the author's point of view is often evident; he made many value judgements even though he often limits himself to stating which sovereigns and other important men were living at a given time. His strong Lutheran orthodoxy colours the whole work, especially the opening chapters, "worshippers of idols" (e.g. pagans) are spoken of.[13] Queen Helena's having had a vision in a dream is referred to without any reservations,[14] likewise it is not doubted that a woman gave birth to a monster in Ravena in 1512.

Subjective interpretation is seen in the discussion of the causes of the Second Civil War in Rome.[15] Herodes, Halldor claimed, was a cruel tyrant.[16] Mutual rivalry and jealousy between Caesar and Pompey plunged Rome into Civil War. As expected, the atrocities attributed to Nero are painted in strong colours.[17] Vespasianus Flavius was a lenient and good sovereign.[18] Those who deviated from the accepted teachings of the Church, such as Arius,[19] are labelled as heretics. Julian the Apostate was "a wicked man"[20] while Constantine is glorified. Rudolph of Habsburg was an outstanding sovereign.[21] The distressing events that took place at the fall of Constantinople are said to be indescribable.[22] In the description of post-Reformation events that have any connection with religion, Halldor's Protestant

sympathies are obvious. He mentions Mary Tudor's "intense persecution" of the Protestants and the "treacherous" and "terrible" murders during the blood-bath of Paris in 1572;[23] the Gunpowder plot of 1605 is vigorously condemned.[24]

Even though Halldor's comments on Icelandic history are relatively sparse, they are informative. He attempts to date the discovery of Iceland, in doing so referring to various works both in Icelandic (The Book of the Icelanders, The Book of Settlements, Torfaeus's works) and Danish (by Holberg, Langebek, Schioning). It is mentioned with regard to the early twelfth century that about that time the Icelanders began to write books a few years earlier than the Danes and the Norwegians. It is significant that cultural matters and historiography have a relatively more important role in the work as far as Iceland is concerned than when the work is taken as a whole. Halldor mentions the death of the priest Saemundur Sigfusson (see Chapter 2) "the remarkable scholar and historian" to whom he attributes not only a history of the Norwegian kings, but also several masterpieces of Icelandic medieval literature, Njal's saga, Ljodaedda, the annal of Oddi, Solarljod, and Havamal.[25] Snorri Sturluson is referred to as "the great historian";[26] he wrote "many useful books".[27]

It is stressed that Iceland and Greenland came under the Norwegian king because of Norwegian endeavour;[28] the improvement in the legal codes under King Magnus is mentioned. But there is no coherent discussion of the downfall of the Icelandic

Commonwealth or the status of Iceland within the Norwegian, later the Danish-Norwegian, monarchy. Like Espolin, Magnus Stephensen and other writers on eighteenth century Iceland, Halldor said that Frederick V was a great benefactor to Iceland; in 1752, the year in which the account ends, he began by gifts of money and other means to help Iceland.

(c) Agrip af nokkurra konunga - og keisara aevum (An Extract of the Lives of a Few Kings and Emperors)

In most cases these lives of Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Mark Antony, Constantine the Great, Theodosius, and Charlemagne appear to be translations, but Halldor says that he did not deal with those aspects of Cyrus's life which were covered by Herodotus. The life of Julius Caesar, on the other hand, is not a direct translation of any one work; Halldor calls it an extract based on what Plutarch, Suetonius, and Tacitus wrote about Caesar.

Among interesting statements found in the work is one about Marcus Aurelius; his virtues, which were said to be unique for a pagan emperor, are stressed. It is noteworthy that the same attitude to Marcus Aurelius is found in Espolin's works (see Chapter 7). It seems as if these orthodox Lutheran Christians regarded him as an exemplary pagan.

This work is not dated as far as I know.

(d) Persakronikur

This work is an extract of Herodotus and some Latin writers, not mentioned, who covered the period from the end of the Persian

Wars to the reign of Alexander the Great. The preface to the first part of the work was written in 1799, but the date of composition of the second part is unknown.

Halldor's purpose seems to have been, above all, to present the essence of his sources rather than rewriting them; he seldom expresses an independent point of view. However, he makes it clear that it has always to be borne in mind that Herodotus was a pagan and that this affects his history: the great God's miracle that took place during the Egyptian campaign is attributed by the pagan Herodotus to their idol Appollo.

(e) Conkvvettin af Mexiko (The Conquest of Mexico)

This appears to be a direct translation of a foreign work, dealing with the conquest by Spain of Mexico and the West Indies. A definite stand towards Spanish-Indian relations is not taken; but there was hardly any particular sympathy for the Indians - it is said that the Spaniards won the Empire (i.e. Montezuma's) through "great difficulties and indefatigable diligence" as well as with the help of the Indians themselves.

(f) An Autobiographical Extract

This is only six pages long, very devout in character. The same manuscript contains Lifshistoria ... Gudrunar Thorbjargar Magnusdottur, which is a very laudatory with religious overtones - indeed it is an obituary and can as such perhaps hardly be classified as history.

Gisli Konradsson

I shall not attempt to survey the total activity of Gisli

Konradsson as a historical writer; indeed, he wrote most of his historical works after the end of the period primarily under survey; he died as late as 1877, almost ninety years old. It was then a quarter of a century since he had become a professional historian when Framfarafelag Flateyinga[29] employed him as a writer. Even though he was sixty-five by then his most productive period was still to come. But in our period Gisli was already a prolific writer, and being a close friend and pupil of Espolin and, being the model of most subsequent folk historians (see Epilogue) he had a very important role in transmitting Espolin's heritage to later generations as well as being a significant historian in his own right.

Gisli's autobiography is a remarkable work. Among other things it throws light on the making of a folk historian - it shows how a boy who did not have a privileged background (his father was a hreppstjori, but he died when Gisli was only a child - in most ways Gisli shared the lot of a common people) and who did not have any formal education became a learned man. It tells how Gisli as a young boy learned to write, making ink by mixing charcoal with the substance left when the sheep had eaten the hay and how he could escape working (on clothmaking etc.) in winter evenings by volunteering to read out stories and intone the rimur. At one stage there was a possibility that Gisli might go to Copenhagen and study law, but for personal reasons this did not materialize and he was to receive no formal education at all. In his early twenties he married and became

a farmer, on various farms in Skagafjardarsysla. In mid-winter he usually went south to the Reykjavik area for the fishing-season, which was a common practice for Northern farmers who were not so well off and needed to supplement their income from farming. At an early age Gisli had become an avid reader and started to copy out manuscripts. Dr. Hallgrimur Scheving, a teacher at the grammar school of Bessastadir, heard of this remarkable farmer from the North who went fishing in the area, made his acquaintance and employed him for copying out manuscripts; there is no doubt that his connection with such a prominent scholar was a great stimulus to Gisli. However, Jon Espolin was undoubtedly the strongest influence on him in the field of learning.

Here I am not going to deal with Gisli's work in detail; most of his works on Icelandic history were written after 1830, and his works on world history, many of which were written before 1836, were translations and adaptations rather than syntheses of various sources. His works on Icelandic history dealt, for instance, with certain regions (Skagstrendinga saga), certain well-known individuals (e.g. an account of the eighteenth century sorcerer Loftur), court cases (e.g. two in which Espolin was involved in Hunavatnssysla during the 1820s); some of his works do not fall into any well-defined category, e.g. the account of Sheriff Halldor Jakobsson and the inhabitants of Strandasysla.

One of the main charadteristics of Gisli's historical writings on Icelandic history is their relatively narrow scope

and his reliance on oral tradition rather than written sources. His style and language are closely related to Espolin's and consequently to the sagas. Structurally, certainly, there are many parallels between Gisli's accounts on one hand and the Sagas of Icelanders and the thaettir on the other; like the medieval writers, Gisli was concerned with individuals and isolated episodes while Espolin was concerned with national, or at least regional, history. However, Gisli follows Espolin's practice in dividing his works into brief chapters, each with its own headings, and at least one work of his - Skagstrendinga saga - has dates in the margins in true Espolinian fashion; in fact it can be classified as regional history in annalistic form like Espolin's Hunv.s. and Skagf.

With his sagnathaettir Gisli helped create an important tradition which has been maintained by the Icelanders' interest in genealogy and personal history down to the present day. It is difficult to make any detailed assessment of Espolin's influence on Gisli and on Gisli's influence on posterity, but it is fair to suggest that when Espolin's influence on posterity is estimated the indirect influence he exerted through Gisli is of considerable importance.

Even though Gisli's writings on foreign history are translations and digests of the works of others, an investigation of the prefaces to them throws light on his approach to historical writing and idea of history. To my knowledge, Gisli wrote prefaces to three works on foreign history: Persasogur

(Lbs.1140,4to.), an untitled work in Lbs.1143,4to., which is largely the same as Soguthaettir nyrri alda I. (IBR.18,4to.), and Nokkrar sannar fornra og nyrra tida sogur og thaettir (Lbs.1154,4to.).

Gisli did not say explicitly why he wrote these works except that he said in the preface to Lbs.1154,4to. that he entertained himself by writing; no doubt he gained intellectual satisfaction from writing them and he clearly hoped that other people would read them even though he could not have hoped that they would be published. In the prefaces to Lbs.1140,4to. and Lbs.1143,4to. he said that the works were written in a hurry and that he did not make fair copies; consequently there would be spelling mistakes and words missing, which he asked benevolent readers to correct.[30]

The preface to Persa sogur (i.e. various accounts of men and events in Persia, Greece, and the Middle East) provides some clues to Gisli's source criticism. We find that he is not totally lacking in sophistication. He said about his accounts of the kings of Phoenecia, Syria and Assyria that they are imperfect, short, and obscure; there is much lacking in the body of knowledge of such great events especially as regards the Assyrians. Gisli said that he related only what is probable (sennilegt) and which will enable people to sense the greatness of the Persian Empire from the days of Cyrus to its subjugation by Alexander the Great. Gisli's comments on his saga of Alexander, based on translated versions of works by Galterus, Plutarch

and Curtius show that he had thought about the nature of these three works and their value as sources. Gisli explained how his work was compiled and what he took from each source. He used Plutarch's history as far as it went, saying that this work had most information about Alexander as a man, while Curtius's history, which was longer, dealt extensively with Alexander's campaigns, and Galterus's work (which, incidentally, was translated into Icelandic in the thirteenth century) was not very reliable. Gisli's source criticism is also seen when he described an account of the Ptolemies, based on Holberg, as "short and imperfect" (stuttur og ofullkominn). It is fair to conclude that Gisli took some pains to make his accounts as full and at the same time as reliable as possible.

In matters of style of language Gisli followed Espolin closely. Indeed, Gisli says that he has tried to copy Espolin's beautiful and concise style (gagn - og fagurýrda stilsmata), which he "understandably" has not fully achieved. This comment is made in the preface to Persa sogur where Gisli states that he has attempted to bring most of the originals "closer to Norse" (naer norraenni tungu), probably the style of the Sagas. In the preface to Lbs.1154,4to. he says explicitly, however, that the saga of Socrates had been rendered closer to the style of the old sagas. The one work in Persasogur which did not need any such revision, in Gisli's opinion, was translated by Espolin. In the preface to Lbs.1143,4to. he mentions with particular reference to his "attempt at translation" that he wrote the

names of people and towns in the way in which they would be pronounced in "Norse". Gisli's concern about characteristics of style is seen in his observation in the preface to Persa sogur that Halldor Jakobsson's Persakronikur were written in the style of tales of chivalry (riddarasogur).

It would be interesting to know how far was Gisli's approach to historical writing influenced by the foreign historical works he had read and translated; the classical authors and modern Danish writers like Holberg, Guldberg, and Sneedorff.[31] It is difficult to pinpoint any particular influences from this direction. Indeed, everything that Gisli wrote about his historical writings fits in with Espolin's approach to the subject.

(2) Finnur Magnusson

His life

Finnur Magnusson was born at Skalholt in 1781. His parents were Magnus Olafsson, who was later to become logmadur, brother of the poet Eggert Olafsson and the antiquarian Jon "Hypnoensis" Olafsson, and Ragnheidur Finnsdottir, sister of Bishop Hannes Finnsson. Thus Finnur and Hannes Finnsson were cousins. Finnur left for Copenhagen University at the age of sixteen where he studied law and philology and dabbled in literature. In 1801 he came back to Iceland without have sat a final examination, and stayed in the country for ten years working for the most part as a solicitor. During this period he began to collect books and manuscripts. Having made the acquaintance of some British scholars, he decided to seek his fortune abroad and went to Copenhagen, via

Edinburgh, in 1812. Interest in Old Norse studies was steadily growing there, and being supported by important people, Finnur embarked upon a successful career as an Old Norse scholar. He was awarded the title of professor in 1815, began to lecture at the University and later became a permanent government employee. In 1828 he was appointed keeper of the privy archives and secretary to the Arnamagnaeiske commission, positions he kept until his death, in 1847. In this later period Finnur took active part in public life in Denmark, enjoying the favour of the Danish government.

A voluminous writer (writing all his main works in Danish), Finnur was in the 1820s and '30s regarded as perhaps the foremost Old Norse scholar of the day, especially in Scandinavian mythology and runology. He also wrote a great deal on Old Norse poetry and edited several medieval texts. But being a man of inadequate specialized education and too vivid imagination, his works have not stood the test of time well.

With the exception of what Finnur wrote on contemporary events (see Chapter 12), perhaps only one work of his can be labelled as historical: Om de Engelskes Handel og Faerd paa Island i det 15. Aarhundrede isaer med Hensyn til Columbus's formeentlige Reise dertil i Aaret 1477 og hans Beretninger desangaaende (in Danish; "On the trade and the activity of the English in Iceland in the fifteenth century, especially with regard to the voyage that Columbus is thought to have undertaken to there in 1477 and his accounts relating to this").

His brief Udsigt over den kaukasiske Menneskestammes aeldste Hjemsted og Udvandringer (in Danish; "A survey of the original home of the Caucasian race and its migrations"), 1820, may perhaps be described as an historical-anthropological essay, but as it was an introduction to lectures on Old Norse mythology and poetry it seems logical to place it in that category of Finnur's writings.

The English in Iceland in the Fifteenth Century

The purpose of this essay was to show that it was very likely that Columbus had visited Iceland in 1477 and that the information he gathered there confirmed his belief that a voyage across the Atlantic would be worth embarking on. The essay may thus be seen as part of Finnur's endeavour to show the importance of medieval Scandinavian culture. The bulk of the essay is concerned with establishing the extent in the fifteenth century of the Anglo-Icelandic trade - a subject on which no special study had been written until then. Various sources were referred to, e.g. several annals, including those of Espolin, Historia ecclesiastica Islandiae, Olafur Stefansson's essay on Icelandic economic history, and Jon Eiriksson's draft for an essay on the same subject. The Icelanders, Finnur argued, certainly knew about the continent in the west - the most recent source concerning Greenland and Markland that Finnur knew of dates from 1347 - and the English must have wondered about the fate of the ships that did not return from Iceland. Ergo: knowledge of America may very well have spread from England to the continent.

Columbus said that he had travelled to Tile or Frisland in 1477. Finnur tried to prove by means of etymology that this country was indeed Iceland. He pointed out that there was evidence that merchants from Bristol had sailed to Iceland in the same year; most likely Columbus had travelled with them. Hence the following hypothesis: if Columbus actually had conversations in Latin with learned men in Iceland about the lands in the west it is easier to understand his zeal for a voyage of discovery. Given that this theory was correct "the fateful discovery of America must be seen as an immediate result of the Norsemen's earlier discovery, which thus must be regarded as one of the most important events in history."[32]

The essay is well documented with extensive footnotes and the evidence is marshalled in a most professional way even though Finnur's unbridled enthusiasm for his subject, which sometimes carried him away when he wrote about matters like runes and mythology, left perhaps too clear a mark on the argument. In Icelandic historiography of the period the "modern" approach is equalled only in Hannes Finnsson's and Magnus Stephensen's works.

(3) Tomas Saemundsson

Tomas Saemundsson was born in the South of Iceland in 1807, the son of a prosperous farmer. He became student in 1827 and in the same year went to Copenhagen University where he received his degree in divinity in 1832. Then he spent two years travelling in Europe, and after that he served as a parson in the South

of Iceland until he died prematurely of tuberculosis in 1841. Tomas is best known for his part in the publication of the annual Fjolnir; he played an important role in Icelandic politics. In many ways he was influenced by the Enlightenment; after Magnus Stephensen's day he was its only major representative in Iceland. However, he was very much a child of his own time; his political thought, for instance, was shaped by contemporary thought.[33]

Strictly speaking, Tomas was not a historian, but his writings on historical theory justify his inclusion here. These are found in a book he wrote about his travels in Europe in the winter 1834-5, in an incomplete introduction where he discussed various disciplines; the section on history[34] is in the region of 2,000 words. Comments in other parts of the work also throw light on Tomas's idea of history.

There are certain similarities between this and the ideas of Magnus Stephensen and other historians of the period. There are three main aspects of Tomas's conception of history. First, there is belief in divine providence; second, a didactic view of history; thirdly, that he, in true Enlightenment fashion, regarded progress as the proper criterion of historical developments. On the other hand, Tomas's attitude towards historical sources and source criticism bore unmistakably the stamp of ideas prevalent in Europe in his own day. One wonders whether he was influenced by the German historical school, or more specifically, even by the Rankean school. During his European journey he spent two months in Berlin and became well acquainted

with German scholars and German culture; that apart, Denmark was pervaded by German thought during Tomas's stay there.

Tomas described history as one of the most delightful disciplines, on which all others are dependent. It belongs to everybody; it is useful and gives knowledge and pleasure; therefore it is called the light and guide of life; without it people would be as if in darkness.[35] The didactic element in Tomas's historical thought is seen in his statement that people can learn from history how they should behave in all situations that arise in life, and what factors create the prosperity of nations and what leads to their fall and destruction. This is followed by an indication of Tomas's religious determinism: it is particularly in history, he said, that the ways of the "invisible ruler of all things" can be glimpsed and, in addition, as he put it, the winding road along which mankind is directed towards the goal which it was set at the Creation.

Tomas's notion of history is evident where he dealt with sources and stated that until recently most written sources, except actual histories, had been neglected.[36] It had not previously been realized that the real task of the historian was to follow the progress of mankind stage by stage, its increase and development class by class, nation by nation, through all ages and the interrelation between these factors; generally speaking, to look for the hidden causes of events, which in "external general history" (hinni ytri yfirlitssogu) are shown without a coherent order (reglulaust). Only by using this approach can full use, enlightenment, and pleasure be derived from history.

The discussion of historical sources, which forms the bulk of the section on history, shows how deeply Tomas had thought about the nature of history. He began by discussing the various kinds of material remains and the nature of archaeology. It is not only ancient works of art that are valuable: all antiquities are an invaluable contribution to knowledge - knowlege of a certain man or a certain country, material culture or customs. Even though antiquities do not speak out loud, their testimony is infallible. It is a characteristic of enlightened times that remains from the past are preserved and cared about. No patriot can neglect the antiquities that might be found in his country. It is implied here that one of the functions of history is to enable people to form their identity - a view that is apparent in Espolin's historical writings, too. Tomas was not concerned only with knowledge for its own sake. He denigrated those who would either destroy remains of the past or sell them abroad. He emphasized the value for the Icelanders of the old manuscripts and asked him who disrespected antiquities whether he would really have no interest in visiting a splendid temple at Thingvellir and other medieval houses if this were possible.

(4) Two teachers at Bessastadir grammar school

Remarkable comments on the nature of history by two teachers at the grammar school-cum-college of divinity at Bessastadir have been preserved: Sveinbjorn Egilsson (see Chapter 1) and Jon Jonsson. The latter was born in Southwest

Iceland in 1777, became student in 1801, studied at Copenhagen University, mainly philosophical propaedeutics and philology, from 1805 to 1807 when he became adjunkt at Bessastadir, a post he held until his death in 1817.

In the school the main emphasis was laid on theology, Greek and Latin, but of other subjects history was one of the most important. It was taught for four hours a week in each of the two classes. Lecture notes from Bessastadir and works on history which at least in some cases were written as lectures have been preserved.[37] It seems as if priority was given to ancient history, which was presented in a fairly conventional way - the Bible was accepted as history, for instance - with considerable attention given to the geographical setting of the individual histories. However, Sveinbjorn wrote about English history and produced a brief history of the Prussians, and the notes in 1194b,4to. deal with the earlier Middle Ages.

In an introduction to his Veraldarasaga, which in fact is a history of pre-Hellenic times and of Ancient Greece, Sveinbjorn defined history in a sophisticated way. "Saga"[38] is an account of the most remarkable events which have taken place (frasogn merkilegustu vidburda sam sked hafa); world history or the history of mankind deals with the most remarkable events among the nations of the world (medal heimsthjodanna). In a phrase which brings to mind Ranke's later dictum Sveinbjorn said that when everything is told as it happened sagan is true,

which is its main virtue. There were two sources for history: things were either seen or heard, i.e. either witnessed or heard about. Information of both kinds can be valuable, but especially the former. When there are intermediaries there is always danger of an account becoming distorted. The only way of ensuring accuracy is to write something down as soon as, or not long after, events occur. Sveinbjorn argued, however, that an account which predated the age of writing - sögusögn (or Traditio as he called it) could be true. The implication is that scepticism must not be taken too far.

It was the task of history, Sveinbjorn claimed, to know where and when an event had taken place; hence knowledge of geography and chronology was essential for the understanding of history. He divided history into three basic categories, i.e. the "uncertain" history of the most ancient times (þa allra elstu ovissu), the "certain" ancient history (þa gomlu vissu), and more recent history. Sveinbjorn's belief in divine providence was evident where he dealt with the beginning of history, the origins of the world. It is easy to understand, he said, that no man was present: hence people have tried to solve this problem by means of inference (med alyktunum). As can be expected, the notions of individual nations differ, but they all have various elements in common. The oldest and most remarkable account can be found in the Mosaic law; whoever the author was, it is evidently very old. Because God is omnipotent it is likely that he actually created everything out of nothing as it says in

the Old Testament.

Jon Jonsson, in the introduction to his lectures 1810-11, was concerned with the nature of history in a more general way than Sveinbjorn was. Taken together, their introductions show that the pupils at Bessastadir were made to think about what was involved in history as a discipline. According to Jon, history could be divided in three different ways. First, into branches: there was political (civil)-(borgaraleg) history, ecclesiastical history, and natural history (Natturu historia); second, with regard to geographical scope: history could be either general or specific; thirdly, chronologically. To Jon there were two categories of sources, oral and written. He emphasized that the early history of every nation was based on oral sources, and implied that written evidence had some kind of authority (Skriflegar eftirretningar eru markverdar). Like Sveinbjorn Egilsson Jon attached much importance to geography and chronology as auxiliary sciences to history. He divided geography into two branches without explaining the division fully, "historical" geography, which is concerned with the condition of the Earth (thad retta jardar asigkomulag), and "mathematical" geography. Jon also explained chronological concepts and what chronology meant in practice. When history was written, there was a choice between two approaches, Jon claimed. It could be either "ethnographic", dealing with one particular country, or "synchronic", dealing with a certain period. Jon chose the latter approach in his history; he wrote about ancient history in general terms and divided it into five sections.

REFERENCES

1 In the MS. Lbs. 2446, 4to.

2 A list of the property, including books, of Jon Jakobsson's widow, Sigridur Stefansdottir, compiled after her death, is preserved in the National Archive of Iceland.

3 IB. 77. 8vo.

3a Syslumannaaevir i Nordlendingafjordungi, p.18, p.51, p.57.

4 ibid. p.52

5 ibid. p.59

5a "... medal hverra eg thekki ei af sogunum nokkurn staerri og virdulegri en kong Kristjan 4da Danakonung."

6 "Oska eg tho thetta litla verk maetti verda minum elskulegu landsmonnum til laerdomseflingar og aeskilegra nota."

6a "Uden Chronologie er Historien blind paa sit hojre Oje (det andet er Geographie) og uden Historie er Mennesked bestandig et Barn. Thessa og marga fleiri vitnisburdi laet eg mer duga til ad afsaka naerverandi litla Chronologiska speciminis utgafu orsakir."

7 "Adskiljanleg faheyrd og frodleg aevintyri finnast her og hvar i thessu skrifi, sem forthena eftirtekt og athugasemi vidvaninga."

8 Agrip af konunga- og keisaraaevum, Chapter 30.

9 See, for instance, Chron.Tent. p.5

10 ibid. p.6

11 ibid. p.61

12 ibid. p.62

13 ibid. p.4

14 ibid. p.29

15 ibid. p.17

16 ibid. p.18

17 ibid. p.23

18 ibid. p.24

19 ibid. p.29

20 ibid. p.31

21 ibid. p.57

22 ibid. p.64

23 ibid. p.70

24 ibid. p.73

25 ibid. p.52

26 ibid. p.54

27 ibid. p.56

28 ibid. p.57

29 Flateyjar framfara stofnfelags breflega felag, as it came to be officially known, functioned on the island Flatey, W Iceland, c.1833-c.1870 and was concerned with culture, pditics, and the advancement of the economy.

30 All three prefaces.

31 Gisli's list of his books (preserved in the National Archive of Iceland) ~~in Iceland~~ shows that he possessed several historical works other than those which he translated.

32 "Da maa og hans folgerige Opdagelse af Amerika antages for en middelbar Folge af Nordboernes aeldre, som saaledes maatte regnes til Fortidens vigtigste Begivenheder."

33 For information about Tomas's life, see (Bishop) Jon Helgason, Tomas Saemundsson, Reykjavik 1942, and Jakob Benediktsson's introduction to Tomas's Ferdabok, Reykjavik 1947.

34 Ferdabok, pp.346-52

35 ibid. p.346

36 ibid. p.351f

37 Notes taken after Jon Jonsson's lectures in Lbs. 1615, 8vo., lectures by Sveinbjorn Egilsson in IB. 282, 8vo., a "world history" by Sveinbjorn in IB. 62, 4to., some lecture notes on history in Lbs. 1194 a-b, 4to. There is also a manuscript

(Lbs. 283, 8vo.) written by Sveinbjorn Egilsson which contains lectures in Danish, on Swedish history from Gustavus Vasa to Charles XI, but it seems very unlikely that he was the author.

CHAPTER 12

REPORTING OF CONTEMPORARY EVENTS ABROAD

This chapter deals with accounts of current events in Icelandic periodicals in the period 1796-1833. The periodicals in question were Minnisverd tidindi, Klausturposturinn, and the two annuals of the Literary Society, Islenzk sagnablod and Skirnir. Moreover attention is given to one newsletter which appeared in the annual Armann a Althingi (AaA). There were four authors of these accounts. Magnus Stephensen wrote about the French Revolution and periods 1795-98 and 1799-1801 in Minn.tid. and about the period 1818-26 in Klp. Finnur Magnusson wrote about 1801-4 in Minn.tid. and the foreign news accounts in the annuals of the Literary Society 1816-27, the first of which was preceded by an account of events in the world since 1804. Thordur Jonassen wrote in the 1828-9 and 1831-3 volumes of Skirnir. Baldvin Einarsson wrote Skirnir 1830 and the newsletter in the same year. For the purpose of this survey I have omitted Stefan Stephensen, Magnus Stephensen's brother, who wrote the account of 1798-9 in Minn.tid.

An outline of the lives of Magnus Stephensen and Finnur Magnusson has been given elsewhere. Thordur Jonassen (1800-1880), born at Reykholt where his father was parson, passed the studentsprof in 1820 and worked for a few years in Iceland before he went to the University of Copenhagen where he received a degree in law in 1830. After that he worked in the Danish chancery for five years; he then went home and was sheriff for

two years, until he was appointed a judge in the National High Court, where he became Supreme Justice in 1856, a post he held until his retirement. During his official career he received various honours. Baldvin Einarsson was born in 1801, the son of a farmer in North Iceland. He became student in 1825, went to Copenhagen to read law in 1827 and was awarded his degree in 1831. Two years later he died tragically of burns. Baldvin is an important figure in Icelandic history as he was the forerunner of the great nineteenth century champions of national liberty. For a period of four years he co-edited and to a considerable extent wrote AaA, which was very influential despite its short lifespan.

Minn.tid. and Klp. were written and printed in Iceland while the other periodicals were written and published in Copenhagen and sent to Iceland in the spring; each account covers the period from one late winter to the next. It is safe to assume that the main sources for these accounts were various Danish journals, but only Magnus Stephensen, in vol. I of Minn.tid., and in Klp.[1] referred explicitly to his sources for accounts of foreign events. He said that these were of several kinds, for instance the Danish journal Minerva, or information from various Icelanders, apparently Icelanders in Copenhagen who wrote to him directly or to people he knew at home. When writing Klp. Magnus obviously relied heavily on news brought by the crews and passengers of ships sailing to Iceland.[2] We may surmize that Magnus also relied on private

letters, but how far he used printed material is hard to tell. Finnur Magnusson when living in Iceland presumably collected his foreign news in a similar way. He listed various people who were giving him help and advice with the work but this acknowledgement may at least partly refer to his accounts of domestic events; in Minn.tid. accounts of Icelandic affairs in the old annalistic tradition went together with the sections on current events abroad. It is impossible to specify his exact sources for the accounts written in Copenhagen.

The circulation of the four periodicals was good by Icelandic standards - several hundred copies.[3] This was the only printed information that the Icelanders, with the exception of a small circle of learned men who bought foreign books and periodicals, could obtain about events abroad and there is no doubt that the accounts were avidly read by the news-hungry public. Because of the existence of Isl.sbl. Magnus, when he launched Klp., saw no need to devote much space to foreign affairs. But as Klp. was a monthly while Isl.sbl. was an annual, Magnus's readers insisted on his printing foreign news, a demand with which to a certain extent he complied.[4]

The length of the accounts of contemporary events abroad under review is considerable. The first volume of Minn.tid. (covering the period 1795-8) is 482 pages, Magnus's section in the second volume 316 pages, and Finnur's contribution in the third volume some 250 pages. Each page would contain c.300 words, roughly the same as each page in Klp. The eight volumes of the latter are about 2000 pages, but only a relatively small

fraction of these, probably somewhere between 100 and 200 pages, were devoted to foreign affairs. In Isl.sbl. each year was described in some 7,000 to 10,000 words; the accounts in Skirnir were on the whole roughly twice as long, but the newsletter is considerably shorter.

The structures of the various foreign news accounts are similar in that the greater part of each of them deals with individual countries and continents under separate headings. Most of the accounts begin with France and Great Britain, then the writers take the readers on a tour round the world, ending with Denmark or the Danish realm (when the writers dealt with Iceland separately, they did so in their final sections). However, in the accounts in Isl.sbl. and Skirnir there was added a general introductory section on the weather, the harvest and natural disasters; each of the seasons was sometimes treated separately. In addition Baldvin Einarsson, in Skirnir, and sometimes Thordur Jonassen made at the beginning some observations on the progress of history. Generally speaking, the accounts in question may be compared with The Annual Register and other publications of its kind.

Even accounting for the introductory sections in Isl.sbl. and Skirnir it is fair to say that there was always a definite emphasis on political and military affairs; this was indeed an era of drums-and-trumpet news reporting as well as drums-and-trumpet history. However, there were occasional references to the economy of individual countries, and not unnaturally, in view

of his life-long interest in natural history, Magnus touched on things of this kind, at times he referred to new inventions. In this he is similar to Finnur in whose accounts of individual countries there are several references to non-political matters.[5] Cultural and intellectual matters were on the whole given short shrift by the current events reporters; in this way they contrast with Espolin, who was concerned with intellectual developments in all his works on contemporary history, not only in Kkjs.B. Other things apart, it seems likely that to the four news chroniclers yearly reports of events were not the most suitable place for analysis of trends in intellectual life.

The four writers had certain things in common. They had all had the experience of a period of living in Copenhagen where they, like Espolin, had studied or were studying law at the time when they wrote. Unlike Espolin, they were all writing for immediate, or at least for eventual definite publication and had a good idea of the composition of their future audience. They were not writing merely for their own intellectual satisfaction. As was the case with Espolin, Magnus's avowed intention when he launched his first periodical was to educate the nation. He inserted his account of the French Revolution before that of events in 1795-6 so that people could see matters in their proper context. Knowledge of foreign events was to lead the nation to change its ways for the better.[6] When he published Klp., however, he did not regard foreign news as so important as he did when he was a young man.[7] Finnur says in the intro-

duction to vol.I of Isl.sbl. that the trouble he took in writing the account would be repaid by a favourable reception by his countrymen; he had written in order to give them a useful pastime (til nytsamrar daegrastyttingar). There is a distinct didactic element in Baldvin's newsletter, addressed to a "friend", but how Thordur's approach was determined by thoughts of his audience is less clear.

Like Espolin, all four writers made references to God's role in historical processes. The level and nature of these references differed very much, however, The way in which Magnus's belief in divine providence affected his historical writings has been dealt with in Chapter 10: it was an integral if unobtrusive part of his idea of history. Like Magnus, Baldvin believed in God's direct intervention in human affairs. He spoke of the Almighty, who leads all revolutions in the life of the nations to the goal that he finds most desirable.[8] Two "important things" could be deduced from events in Greece in the preceding years: first, how God sometimes helps the distressed in a curious way, and secondly, how he sometimes uses people as his tools (like the English in this instance). He suggested that Canning became minister so that the Greeks might be helped; he lived only to fulfil this mission and died a year later.[9] Baldvin seems to have been fond of theorizing and did not limit himself to religious determinism. In the introduction to the newsletter he compared the life of nations with the life of individual human beings: nations have their

youth and old age, but sometimes they are rejuvenated. There are indications of a cyclical theory of history in this statement.[10] Thordur and Finnur were much less concerned with theorizing than were Magnus and Baldvin. In so far as he had one at all there is no elaborate exposition of Thordur's idea of history. He expressed his religious faith and proclaimed his belief in divine providence by referring to any omnipotent guiding hand that decides the course of events for the best,[11] but no examples were given. A comparison of history with drama,[12] a reference to a consequential battle between light and darkness in the region of the South Seas[13] and speculations about the course history was taking[14] throw some light on the way in which Thordur regarded historical processes, but do not clarify his religious determinism. Similarly, although Finnur's references to God in Minn.tid. should not be seen merely as rhetorical devices, none of them carries extensive theoretical implications. He said e.g. that God blessed the North and spoke of "God's gifts to the Northern quarter"![15] He said too that next to God France was most indebted to Napoleon for its security from wolves in sheep's clothing, that is, men like Robespierre;[16] on the other hand, he said that if Napoleon's pomp and arrogance increased as rapidly in future as they had done so far, we must wish that God be merciful to the poor in France.[17] Progress was not mentioned at all, and in Isl.sbl. theoretical speculations are altogether absent.

The political and social thought of all four men was less

conservative than that of Espolin in his old age. Of the four, Finnur was the most conservative, at least in the later period when he was writing about current events. As an employee of the Danish government he was firmly on its side and a poem he dedicated to King Frederick in 1815 was instrumental in his appointment as professor, which was a milestone in his career. His association with the Danish Establishment was bound to influence his outlook. Thordur, even though he was a loyal monarchist, became a civil servant during the period when he wrote for Skirnir and eventually a royal appointee to the Althing, was not an ultra-conservative at the time in question; his transfer from the study to the government offices seems not to have influenced him in this respect. He should rather be described as a moderate European liberal for his day. Magnus, as seen in the chapter on him, was in every way a man of the Enlightenment. Baldvin had several things in common with him even though Magnus was cosmopolitan while Baldvin was nationalistic, and although the latter, though not a radical, embraced some new political ideas which the older man did not approve of.[18]

Of the four writers, Magnus was the only one who wrote specifically about the French Revolution and its immediate aftermath. It was only natural that Magnus had a favourable view of the nation of the philosophes and an ally of Denmark, and in view of the course of events during the period which Magnus wrote about for Minn.tid., extensive coverage was bound to be given to France. As was the case with Espolin in his youth,

Magnus's sympathies were with the moderate revolutionaries. He put forward the following causes for the Revolution: many earlier wars of long duration, the immoderation of the kings and the courts, the supremacy of the king, nobility, and clergy, and the self-seeking and covetousness of ministers.[19] This is essentially the same explanation that Espolin advanced in Nord.s. As for the actual revolutionaries, Magnus spoke well of the "wise and the gentle",[20] meaning the moderate wing. But the sansculottes were defined as the most cruel men and a pick of the rabble in the Jacobin societies,[21] and Robespierre and the "impious tyrant" Marat were spoken of with disgust;[22] the revolutionaries' attitude to religion was clearly unacceptable to him. His views on them did not change, as is evident from his account of the first quarter of the nineteenth century and indeed the whole revolutionary period.[23] When Finnur looked back on the Revolution,[24] his attitude was more strongly negative. The French, he said, need hardly any more fear destructive revolutions (eydileggjandi stjornarbyltingar), which hitherto so often have threatened to bring her back to the old slavery (sic) or anarchy.

But even though Magnus disapproved of many things that took place in France in the 1790s he, like Espolin, also condemned the wars that other European countries waged with France and mocked their professed altruistic motives.[25] Magnus admired the military progress of the French until the end of 1794,[26] and even though he was somewhat worried about the course taken by

France in the late 1790s his pro-French attitude is obvious in his implied wish that France's growing strength be accompanied by internal order.[27]

After Napoleon became the dominant figure in France, Magnus had little but praise for France's policies and Napoleon himself. Here, of course, it must be remembered that Magnus stopped writing Minn.tid. in 1808 at the latest, when Napoleon was at the height of his power. While both Espolin and Finnur saw greatness in Napoleon, at least before his fall, Magnus's attitude was basically more favourable, his admiration of the man was accompanied by fewer reservations. He spoke of the great debt of gratitude that France owed Napoleon,[28] and referred approvingly to various measures taken by him.[29]

By the time Magnus next wrote about foreign affairs in 1818, Napoleon had become a prisoner on St. Helena and his career was now seen in retrospect. Napoleon is mentioned fairly often in Klp. and discussed at some length just after his death[30] and again in a survey of the first quarter of the century mentioned above. On the basis of this evidence a clear idea of Magnus's post-1815 view of Napoleon can be formed; the first main feature is that Magnus's admiration of Napoleon's talent and positive achievements remained unchanged.[31] He described him as one of the most gifted men, greatest rulers and greatest generals in history.[32] But now Magnus stressed that Napoleon misused his power, he became megalomaniac and obsessed by the idea of dominating Europe, which led to forgetfulness of his own duties

and indifference to the rights of others.[33] However, the third basic element in Magnus's evaluation of Napoleon, is that, despite everything, the French Revolution and the subsequent period of turbulence, associated with Napoleon marked a step forward. The European public began to think more about its rights and learned men began to consider more carefully the rights of governments and subjects. This led rulers to improve on the form of government and law; there was now more leniency and concern for the subject. This was a major achievement, as was the curtailment of the spiritual power of the Pope which "long subjugated everything" (presumably meaning free thought in Catholic countries). Nearly all Europe gained religious freedom, the powers of heresy courts were curbed and autos-da-fe abolished in 1820. "What a step forward in the enlightenment of mankind was taken even though this was achieved at the cost of many people's lives for a short period."[34]

In his final evaluation of the Revolution and of Napoleon Magnus suggested (as discussed in the chapter on Magnus) that he was indeed a tool of Providence. He spoke of the "hopeful consequences" of Napoleon's exploits and tyranny. In addition Magnus argued that Napoleon's career was a warning to all rulers. Their aims should be to govern their own domains well, not to seek expansion. Napoleon also showed what tyranny was, when he dealt with oppressed nations fighting for their rights. Because of this, Magnus maintained that unborn generations would honour Napoleon's memory rather than speak ill of him, diverse as con-

temporary judgements on him were.[35]

Like Magnus, Finnur wrote about Napoleon both in the heyday of his glory and after his fall. In the first period his attitude towards Napoleon was characterized by admiration mixed with fear of his overreaching himself. In the later period every mention of Napoleon called forth philosophical speculations on the inconstancy of power and success. Writing after the peace agreement of Amiens, Finnur said: "France can thank Bonaparte for the domestic and external peace she enjoys. How many faults could she not forgive such a man".[36] But he was apprehensive about Napoleon's faults, about his pomp and arrogance,[37] the absolute nature of his government even though the French seemed generally speaking better off than before, and that he, instead of the phantoms equality and liberty, had become the idol of many Frenchmen.[38] In the account of the period 1804-16 in Isl.sbl. there is a reference to the French experiencing for the first time "the capriciousness of fortune under Napoleon's banner" and Napoleon's dwindling fortunes after the Russian campaign, but on the whole the description of him is fairly neutral; one should not read too much into the philosophical undertones of the statements above.

An outstanding feature of Magnus's and Finnur's writings during the revolutionary-Napoleonic period is their anti-British attitude. No doubt the hostilities between the Danes and the British influenced their outlook. Finnur actually reproached the British for their policy towards the Danes during the war

years. Many of Magnus's comments on the British during the period refer to their waging unjust wars and being hypocritical and fraudulent. In connection with the recurrence of hostilities in 1796, for instance, he mentioned the Germans' lack of foresight, Russia's avarice and pride, "but above all England's constantly treacherous government";[39] Finnur made the same point with reference to a certain utterance of Nelson's.[40] Among the appendices to Minn.tid. III,i is a translation of several English lithographs dealing with Napoleon taken from Minerva, which Finnur included in order to show to what extremes the British had gone, where violent hatred and wilful stubbornness can lead people.[41] He thought that the scandalous British libels on Napoleon had played a part in the end of the peace.[42] Both writers emphasized the high cost of the war and the discontent of the public in Britain; Magnus apparently viewed with approval the efforts of the French to exploit this.[43]

In the post-1815 period, on the other hand, both Finnur and Magnus wrote fairly sympathetically about Britain. This change in attitude was no doubt connected with admiration of Britain's strength and with the end of an unpleasant phase in Dano-British relations, Britain's policy being more to the writers' liking than previously.[44] Magnus admired the British form of government and British freedom;[45] both he and Finnur[46] tended to see the policy of the authorities in a favourable light. Canning's foreign policy and the change of course it involved was viewed with particular approval by them as it was

later by Baldvin.[47] Britain's policy towards Greece was most important in this connection, but the Icelanders liked Canning because they saw him, as Magnus put it, as high-minded in everything and particularly adverse to the oppression of his own as well as other nations.[48]

Sympathy for European movements for national liberty was a common feature in the accounts of the four even though Finnur's attitude to these matters was somewhat ambivalent.[49] How far the writers' Icelandic background influenced them in this respect is difficult to say, but as they, with the exception of Baldvin, did not fight for increased political freedom of their mother country, there seems little reason to see this factor as very significant.

The four expressed themselves in the strongest terms about the Greek War of Independence.[50] The war was seen as a heroic struggle against tyranny. It kindled the imagination of the Icelanders, like that of other Western European nations, among other reasons because of the abhorrence for the religion of the Turks and admiration for ancient Greek history. Moreover, the Turks were hated in Iceland because of the memory of the Algerian pirates - thought of as "Turks" - who raided Iceland in 1627. Magnus thought of Napoleon's invasion of Spain as one of his worst deeds[51] and he took an equally dim view of the intervention of the French in the 1820s. While Finnur took a fairly neutral stand on the issue, both Magnus and Thordur sympathized with the Latin Americans in their struggle for independence, arguing that

they had every right to rebel.[52] These two were equally sympathetic towards the Poles' desire for political freedom.[53] They were also somewhat critical of the British policy towards Ireland[54] although this was qualified by their views on Roman Catholicism, a factor which apparently determined Finnur's way of thinking on the Irish question.[55]

Finnur's outlook on European politics in the Restoration period was on the whole very conservative, while that of Magnus was much less so even though he was basically on the side of the established order. He praised the Holy Alliance in no uncertain terms - "never was a more majestic and desirable alliance of rulers established on the Earth: never one that more hopes for Europe's tranquillity could be attached to"[56] - and spoke, like Espolin and Finnur[57] with particular approval of Alexander I.[58] But he disapproved of the policies of Ferdinand VII of Spain[59] and Louis XVIII[60] - just as he had earlier disapproved of certain aspects of the policies of Frederick William of Prussia[61] and Emperor Leopold[62] - as he regarded them as too conservative and oppressive; amongother things, he resented Louis' treatment of the revolutionaries, at least the "excellent men" among them.

Even though Finnur made a remark, which implied that he disapproved of oppression,[63] he apparently did not altogether approve of the suspension of Habeas Corpus[64] and opposed restrictions of liberty imposed by the Catholic Church,[65] Finnur was a firm supporter of the European monarchs. Only his attitude

to events in Spain was ambivalent; this was because he disliked equally the Spanish liberals and the royalists' close links with the Roman Catholic Church.[66] The Emperors of Austria and Russia were claimed to be the main pillars of peace and tranquillity in Europe,[67] and naturally Finnur did not forget to praise his own king, who "showed himself in every way a true father to his country".[68] Finnur saw all reaction against the Restoration authorities in Italy as unfortunate, both for the country itself and Europe as a whole.[69] Typical was his comment that tranquillity (rosemi) was what France needed most.[70] He had little sympathy for rioters.[71]

In this respect there is much less of a definite pattern in the accounts of Thordur and Baldvin (any estimation of Baldvin is obviously limited because he wrote about world events in one year only). Certain elements in these accounts are the same as, or similar, to those of Finnur, for instance the attitude towards events in Greece and Turkey (Thordur, however, had some praise for the government of the Sultan),[72] Thordur and Baldvin also generally approved of the action taken by the Russian government except that Thordur was critical of their policy towards the Poles (see above); Baldvin was particularly pro-Russian.[73] Like Espolin, both of them, especially Baldvin, regarded Nicholas I as a good monarch. Thordur like Finnur approved of the state of affairs in Austria and of the Emperor himself,[74] and his account of the government of Denmark was equally laudatory as that of Finnur;[75] it was because of the

benevolence of the government that Denmark escaped the turmoil that rocked some other European states in 1830 and the following year. Every mention of government policy towards Iceland is very positive.[76]

On the other hand, Thordur's and Baldvin's moderate political liberalism, which is reminiscent of Magnus but very different from the outlook of Espolin and Finnur is often evident. Thordur and Baldvin were not particularly sympathetic towards the Restoration government in France.[77] Their attitude towards King Dom Miguel was very unfavourable - here they were in agreement with Espolin.[78] Thordur saw the affairs of Spain very much in black and white terms: he wholeheartedly supported the "champions of liberty" against the Church and the political autocrats.[79] Likewise, he sympathized with the reformers in Britain.[80] Baldvin's liberal ideas are clearly seen in his attack on post-Canning British foreign policy, which he regarded as unjust and aimed at checking the progress of other nations.[81]

The contrast with Espolin is marked in Thordur's evaluation of the 1830 revolutions, in the introductions to Skirnir, 1831 and 1832. He argued that there was uniformity in the events of 1830. The basic pattern, as he saw it, was that the nations rebelled against their kings, who were trampling on their subjects' rights and liberties. The peoples forcefully demanded a change and more participation in the government as a means of improving their condition. This demand was just in

some places, but as usual, those who had no reason to do so took the same liberty as the others under the pretext that they were protecting their laws and privileges, even though their action was in practice guided more by a spirit of rebellion than a spirit of liberty.[82] This cautiously positive attitude is seen again in the second account. As Thordur expected, the spirit of liberty and love of independence, evident in the previous year, had made themselves more strongly felt. However, foresight and prudence seemed to have become predominant; therefore, unlike the previous year, riots and deeds of violence did not occur. Thordur saw it as a good sign, in step with the spirit of the age, that old privileges and inherited rights had been reduced and in some cases abolished. In accordance with this general estimate, Thordur's attitude to events in individual countries varied, but he thought that the grievances that kindled the July revolution were quite legitimate.[83]

Magnus and the other writers attached great hopes to the future of overseas territories settled by Europeans. This applies especially to the United States of America. Like many other champions of the Enlightenment Magnus saw what happened there was a dream come true. In 1824 he wrote "North America constantly reaps the benefits of peace, free and wise government and the great and varied riches which this large, fertile and wealthy continent offers to its inhabitants.... everything flourishes rapidly in North America".[84] He and the

other writers made several references to the United States in the same vein.[85] Thordur and Baldvin associated the spirit of liberty and peace particularly with President Jackson. Finnur said that it was thought that Brazil,"this very fertile country which is twice the size of France",would become one of the world's most populous and powerful states. Magnus made an equally positive reference to Chile.[87] He saw great things in store for New Holland (Australia); he thought that its future would be even brighter than that of Brazil.[88] Thordur was worried about the developments in the newly independent Latin American States but he saw the continent as having a great potential. He and Baldvin shared a dislike of Dr. Francia of Paraguay and an admiration of Simon Bolivar.[89]

The writers' attitude towards non-Caucasian peoples was fairly typical of the liberal Europeans of the day; like Espolin they condemned slavery and the slave trade, which Magnus referred to as "a disgrace to mankind".[90] Perhaps here can be seen a "holier than thou" attitude held by the subjects of the Danish monarchy, the first state to abolish slavery.

The material on Asia, Africa and Australia which the writers had at their disposal was limited both in quantity and quality[91] and the accounts were therefore limited in scope. An interesting feature of these is the anthropological-antiquarian fashion in which Finnur and Thordur described the characters, the customs and the habits of the native peoples.[92] Finnur often drew comparisons with medieval Iceland or medieval Scandinavia,which is not really surprising considering that he

was basically a medieval scholar and supposedly even an expert on mythology.[93]

Also in other ways what was written about overseas territories seen through European eyes, and the dealings of Europeans with the native peoples naturally constituted the main theme of the accounts. The attitude was always patronizing, but Finnur and Thordur differed in that Finnur saw the Europeans as always in the right and any opposition to them indefensible[94] while Thordur sometimes saw the other side of the coin, for instance when he gave oppression by the Dutch as the main reason for a rebellion in Java,[95] and referred to discrimination against half-castes in the British colonies in the East Indies which understandably caused bitter resentment.[96] Basically, however, the arrival of the Europeans was always seen as beneficial to the native peoples whose relatively uncivilized state and superstitious beliefs were often referred to in an Enlightenment fashion.[97] Typical was Thordur's reference to Algeria.[98] He was pleased that the Algerians had accepted European culture and customs: "This is a beautiful change and a cause of rejoicing with relation to morality and enlightenment in general." It is certainly not surprising to find that these writers regarded the introduction of Christianity as the most beneficial aspect of the Europeans' impact on the outside world. For instance, Magnus spoke in a very laudatory manner of missionary activity and the English Bible Society.[99] Thordur stated that the spread of Christianity in the South Seas contributed

to the stirring of the light of enlightenment in these regions;[100] Finnur thought it likely that the morality of the islanders would improve in consequence.[101]

Indeed, religion bulked large in the accounts of world events in general. Unlike Espolin, the four writers were not very concerned with the theory of religion, but like him they stressed the role that religion played in politics. The predominant feature in these men's references to religion is a strong anti-Roman Catholic bias. This attitude was prevalent in Iceland from the Reformation and at least to the late nineteenth century. It is, for instance, clearly seen in the works of Pall Melsted (1812-1910), the most important Icelandic mid-nineteenth century historian, whose main works were textbooks on world history.

It has been seen above that Magnus regarded the decline in the power of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church as a crucial development in early nineteenth century Europe; hostile remarks in the same spirit, where the excessive power of the clergy in Roman Catholic countries and its influence on lay government and the intellectual atmosphere in these countries were resented, are numerous.[102] A good example is Thordur's statement that among the misfortunes of Brazil was Roman Catholicism in its strongest form, which with regard to the power of the clergy, superstition, and corrupted morals was perhaps without parallel elsewhere.[103] The writers were particularly concerned about the evil influence of the Jesuits, the

bogeymen of the Lutherans, who, in Baldvin's words, did harm everywhere.[105] At a more abstract level, remarks about the Catholic Church and its institutions and servants, were very hostile.[106] Only rarely were Catholics praised for anything that had to do with religion, as when Finnur mentioned Francis I's tolerance[107] and Thordur spoke favourably of Leo XII's policies.[108]

Matters of religion in the Protestant countries were not often dealt with. However, Finnur approved of attempts to unify the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches, presumably because he wanted to see a united front against Roman Catholicism. Religious policy in non-Christian countries was hardly referred to except in connection with the Turks,[109] because they, unlike other pagans, were seen as oppressors of Christians.

Like Espolin, these writers were impressed by the scientific and technological progress of the age. Magnus mentioned the most important inventions of his day and seems to have been fascinated by developments associated with Industrial Revolution[110] as was Finnur.[111] The admiration of the strength of Britain in the post-1815 period stemmed partly from appreciation of her technical know-how; this is very striking in what Baldvin wrote on the subject[112] critical though he was of British policies in many ways. But nothing gives better insight into these men's thinking on this subject than Finnur's comment on the possibilities opened up by the advent of steam power:

"Locomotives, as big as houses, run automatically, without any horses being needed, on quite level railways, and it is thought that such ingenuity will totally change methods of war in future; gun powder will no longer be needed because steam power will be used to fire shots with much more power than has hitherto been applied."[113]

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1 Klp.VI, 1823, p.29; ibid. p.109; ibid. p.127.

2 Klp.III, 1820, p.75; Klp.IV, 1821, p.83; ibid. p.165; Klp.VI, 1823, p.127; Klp.VII, 1824, p.175.

3 See Olafur Palmason, op.cit.

4 Klp.III, 1820, p.195

5 See, for instance, Minn.tid.III, p.34, p.197; Isl.sbl.IV, 1819-20, p.15; VIII, 1823-4, p.27; IX, 1824-5, p.14; see also below.

6 Preface to Minn.tid. vol.I, "Til lesarans" (To the reader)

7 Klp.III, 1820, p.195 - see above.

8 Skirnir IV, 1830, p.1; a similar attitude occurs in AaA. p.165

9 AaA. p.165

10 ibid. p.164

11 Skirnir V, 1831, p.1f

12 Skirnir II, 1828, p.12

13 Skirnir III, 1829, p.1

14 The introductions to the accounts of 1828, 1829, and 1831.

15 Minn.tid.III, p.115f

16 ibid. p.33

17 ibid. p.30

18 The best account of Baldvin's life and political activities is: Nanna Olafsdottir, Baldvin Einarsson og thjodmalastarfsemi hans, Reykjavik 1961.

19 Minn.tid.I, p.2

20 ibid. p.20

21 ibid. p.56; see also p.61

22 See, for instance, ibid. p.63

23 Klp.IX, 1826, 30ff

24 Minn.tid.III,i, p.32f

25 Minn.tid.I, p.75, p.119, p.196

26 ibid. p.81

27 ibid. p.353

28 Minn.tid.II, p.224

29 ibid. p.169, p.201, p.231, p.294

30 Klp.IV, 1821, p.154f

31 loc.cit., Klp.IX, 1826, p.14ff., p.38ff

32 Klp.IV, 1821, p.154; IX, 1826, p.29

33 Klp.IV, 1821, p.155; see also Klp.IX, 1826, p.14, p.29.

34 Klp.IX, 1826, p.15. "...hvilikt stig mannkynsins framfara i upplysingu var ekki thar vid afram farid, tho thetta um hrid kostadi margra lif."

35 ibid. p.30f

36 Minn.tid.III,i, p.32. "Frankariki a Buonaparte utvortis og innvortis frid ad thakka. - Hvorsu marga bresti maetti thad tha ekki fyrirgefa slikum manni."

37 loc.cit.

38 Minn.tid.III,ii, p.162

39 Minn.tid.I, p.85. "... en umfram allt Englands langvarandi svikafulla stjornan." See also ibid. p.202, p.213, p.230; Minn.tid.II, p.288.

40 Minn.tid.III,i, p.36

41 ibid. p.152

42 Minn.tid.III,ii, p.169

43 See, for instance, Minn.tid.I, p.356

44 Klp.VIII, 1825, p.129; Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.10; IX, 1824-5, p.11

45 Klp.IX, 1826, p.32; VIII, 1825, p.31

46 Isl.sbl.I, 1817, p.54; Isl.sbl.IV, 1819-20, p.7ff

47 See, for instance, Klp.VIII, 1825, p.129; Isl.sbl.VII, 1822-3, p.13; AaA. p.166, p.176; Skirnir IV, 1830, p.2.

48 Klp.VIII, p.129

49 See, for instance, Isl.sbl.V, 1820-1, p.26

50 Klp.IV, 1821, p.154; VII, 1824, p.145; Isl.sbl.VIII, 1823-4, p.33; IX, 1824-5, p.25; AaA. p.165f., p.173; Skirnir III, 1829, p.12; IV, 1830, pp.2-26; V, 1831, p.52; VII, 1833, p.39.

51 Klp.IX, 1826, p.33

52 Klp.VIII, 1825, p.47; Skirnir III, 1829, p.57

53 Minn.tid.I,i, p.139; Skirnir VI, 1832, p.20; VII, 1833, p.67

54 Klp.V, 1822, p.145; Skirnir III, 1829, p.37; V, 1831, p.30

55 Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.7

56 Klp.IX, 1826, p.40. "Aldrei var hatignarlegra og aeskilegra samband stjornenda stofnad a jardriki. Aldrei vonarfyllra fyrir Norduralfunnar ro og heill."

57 Minn.tid.III,i, p.36; Isl.sbl.X, 1826, p.15

58 Klp.IX, 1826, p.41, p.46

59 See, for instance, Klp.VI, 1823, p.199; IX, 1826, p.44

60 Klp.IX, 1826, p.25

61 Minn.tid.I, p.138

62 ibid. p.208

63 Isl.sbl.X, 1826, p.5

64 Isl.sbl.II, 1817, p.53

65 See, for instance, Skirnir I, 1827, p.14

66 Isl.sbl.VII, 1822-3, p.6, p.21; VIII, 1823-4, p.3f

67 Isl.sbl.VIII, 1823-4, p.23

68 Isl.sbl.X, 1825-6, p.33

69 Isl.sbl.V, 1820-1, p.14; Skirnir I, 1827, p.3

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71 See, for instance, Isl.sbl.IV, 1819-20, p.7ff, p.33; VII, 1821-2,p.11

72 Skirnir III, 1829, p.12; V, 1831

73 AaA. p.170f, Skirnir IV, 1830, p.21ff

74 Skirnir V, 1831, p.46, p.48; VI, 1832, p.29

75 See, for instance, Skirnir V, 1831, p.75ff

76 See, for instance, Skirnir VI, 1832, p.85

77 Skirnir II, 1828, p.14; III, 1829, p.16; IV, 1830, 31ff

78 Skirnir III, 1829, p.35; IV, 1830, 33ff; V, 1831, p.39

79 Skirnir II, 1828, p.18; III, 1829, p.21; V, 1831, pp.33-8; VII, 1833, p.18

80 Skirnir VI, 1832, p.49ff

81 AaA. p.176

82 Skirnir V, 1831

83 Skirnir V, 1831, p.3

84 Klp.VII, 1824, p.99. "Nordur-Amerika nytur stodugt fridarins heilla, frjalsrar og vitrar stjornar og theirra miklu alls konar audaefa og natturugaeda uppsprettulinda, sem su stora, frjofsama og rika heimsalfa bydur fram buum sinum...Allt blomgast odum i Nordur-Ameriku."

85 Klp.IV, 1821, 160f; Isl.sbl.IV, 1819-20, p.20; Skirnir II, 1828, p.24; III, 1829, p.60; IV, 1830, p.50; V, 1831, p.66f; VI, 1832, p.41f.

86 Isl.sbl.IX, 1824-5, p.36

87 Klp.VII, 1824, p.113

88 Klp.VIII, 1825, p.148

89 Skirnir II, 1828, p.23; III, 1829, p.58f; IV, 1830, p.48, p.50; V, 1831, p.73

90 Minn.tid.II, p.282; see also Klp.VI, 1823, p.62; Isl.sbl.I,1816, p.17; Skirnir V, 1831, p.67f.

91 See Isl.sbl.I, 1816, p.7 and VI, 1821-22, p.33

92 Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.23; VIII, 1823-4, p.40; Skirnir III, 1829, p.49, p.52.

93 Isl.sbl.VIII, 1823-4, p.35; IX, 1824-5, p.26, p.30

94 See for instance Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.23; IX, 1824-5, p.33; X, 1825-6, p.25

95 Skirnir III, 1829, p.50

96 Skirnir II, 1828, p.27

97 Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.23; X, 1825-6, p.25; Skirnir II, 1828, p.6

98 Skirnir V, 1831, p.16f.

99 Klp.IV, 1821, p.163; VII, 1824, p.163

100 Skirnir III, 1829, p.55

101 Isl.sbl.X, 1825-6, p.27

102 See, for instance, Minn.tid.III,i, p.52; Klp.IX, 1826, p.44, p.180; Isl.sbl.VIII, 1823-4, p.4; Skirnir II, 1828, p.19; III, 1829, p.15; IV, 1830, p.33, VII, 1833, p.19.

103 Skirnir II, 1828, p.23

104 Klp.V. 1822, p.45; Isl.sbl.VI, 1821-2, p.7; Skirnir III, 1829, p.37.

105 Minn.tid.III,i, p.52; Skirnir IV, 1830, p.31; see also p.33; VII, 1833, p.9.

106 Minn.tid.I, p.135; Klp.IX, 1826, p.20, p.175

107 Isl.sbl.IV, 1819-20, p.23

108 Skirnir II, 1828, p.46

109 Klp.IV, 1822, p.183; see above

110 Klp.III, 1820, p.84; IV, 1821, p.161ff, p.200; VI, 1823, p.14, p.20; VII, 1824, p.106, p.142.

111 See Minn.tid.III,ii, p.188; Isl.sbl.X, 1825-6, p.10

112 Skirnir IV, 1830, p.46

113 Isl.sbl.IX, 1824-5, p.11. "Dampvagnar storir sem hus fleygja ser thar sjalfkrafa fram, an thess ad nokkurra hesta vid thurfi, a rennslettum jarnbrautum, og thad meina menn, ad slikar konstir muni gjorsamlega umbreyta allri stridsadferd eftirleidis, en byssupudurs ei muni fremur vid thurfa, thar dampar framvegis muni ein hlitir til skota a miklu kroftugri hatt en hingad til hefur tidkadur verid."

CHAPTER 13

ICELANDIC HISTORIOGRAPHY, C.1790-C.1830, IN ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The subject can be approached at two levels. First, an attempt can be made to assess the relative importance of the "native" and "cosmopolitan" elements in Icelandic historiography of the period. Second, matters can be seen from a European point of view and an attempt made to establish Iceland's place in European (and world) historiography of the period.

Special attention must be paid to Denmark as a link between Iceland and the outside world. Danish historiography dates back to Saxo Grammaticus. In the seventeenth century the collection of source materials - antiquarianism - was the predominant trend. However, the influence of Mabillon and his contemporaries, who revolutionized historical scholarship, was soon felt in Denmark. Eighteenth century Danish historians of den laerde line (literally: "the learned line") not only collected source materials, but studied them critically and published important texts so that these might form the basis of authentic history. Much medieval material was published by historians of this group such as Hans Gram (1685-1748), Jacob Langebek (1710-1775), who published the earlier volumes of Scriptores rerum Danicarum medii aevi, and P.F. Suhm (1728-1798), whose history of Denmark - in reality a collection of sources - reached c.1400.

There were also those who wrote actual histories. Some of these concentrated on writing general works; some did not care much about source criticism. The main contemporary currents

- rationalism, pragmatism, interest in cultural history, eclecticism - are seen in the works of men like Andreas Hoier, historiographer royal in the early part of the century, Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), who wrote energetically on a variety of historical topics, and Erik Pontoppidan (1698-1764), who wrote for instance about Danish church history and Norwegian history.

In the early nineteenth century Danish historiography enjoyed a high reputation,[1] even though it was not a very productive period in terms of publication, partly because of adverse economic conditions. German influences on Danish historiography were particularly marked in this period, as they were in many other countries. Another important trend was the great interest taken in mythology, stimulated by lectures given on the subject by Henrik Steffens, a German philosopher, and in Old Norse studies in general, which tied in with the rise of Romanticism. Among those who worked in this field Bishop Peter Erasmus Müller (1776-1834), the editor of the Sagabibliothek, was prominent, as was the famous N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), who also wrote a noteworthy world chronicle. Several learned societies, old and new, played an important role in medieval and other historical studies, but most of the historians of the period were employed by Copenhagen University, libraries, and archives.[2]

In Iceland, as has been seen, the situation was different. The historians living in Iceland, apart from Gisli Konradsson in his later days, were not professionals because writing, and

certainly the writing of history, was not a means of livelihood and, with the exception of the teachers at Bessastadir, not directly connected with their day-to-day work. In Iceland there was no university, there was only one public library, founded late in the period, and there were no men of private fortunes who could afford to spend their lives merely studying and writing. The audience of the Icelandic historians was very limited because of the size of the community. Most of their histories were not written with an eye to publication (the main exceptions were Halldor Jakobsson's Chron.tent. and Fuldst.Eft., Mannf.hall., Magnus Stephensen's works on Iceland in the eighteenth century, the final sections of Espolin's annals and Ken.Sagn., and Finnur Magnusson's essay on the English trade), and of those which actually were published, rarely more than a few hundred copies were printed. The readership of works which existed only in manuscript copies was much smaller. But Iceland was unusual in that as late as this, unpublished works formed an important section of the country's historical literature: users of manuscripts constituted a specific reading public, small if compared with that of other European countries, but very considerable in proportion to the population of Iceland. Some of Espolin's and Halldor Jakobsson's direct and indirect references to an audience, for instance, could apply only to manuscript readers.

The tradition of "folk history" or "popular history" - history written by men who had not had much formal education - was also a particularly Icelandic phenomenon. Interest in his-

tory at grass-roots level, among the common people, was probably greater in Iceland than in most countries. The reasons for this must be sought in the nature of Icelandic society and culture. Also, annals cast in the medieval mould, more or less, were still being written in Iceland while in most other countries this form of historical writing had run its course a long time ago. Some learned men in Iceland wrote history in sketchy form, not attempting to write sophisticated works. It is noticeable that when the Icelanders ventured outside their own country in their historical writings they were largely concerned with translating and adapting, sometimes in the form of extracts. The number of works written on the history of the outside world was remarkably high, but even though there was a marked subjective element in some of these, hardly any can be said to be based on research into primary sources (the final sections of Espolin's Kkjs.B are to a certain extent an exception). In Europe, (this does not apply to every single country, but is a fair generalization), on the other hand, many historians were engaged in scholarly research into the history of other nations than their own.

This is not to deny that there were considerable foreign influences on Icelandic historiography in the period and that some parallels can be drawn between Iceland and other countries. This interrelation, however, was affected by the time-lag between intellectual developments in Europe and Iceland. By thetime the Age of Reason is commonly taken to have ended, the second stage

of the Enlightenment in Iceland, what I call "the later Enlightenment" was about to begin (in the 1790s) and it did not entirely peter out until the 1830s. Various currents which affected European historiography, such as Romanticism and nationalism, did not play a very prominent role in Icelandic historiography in this period and the Rankean school certainly did not affect it. Post-1790 European trends were best seen contemporaneously in Icelandic historiography in religious controversies, partly an orthodox backlash against the philosophy, especially the religious ideas, of the Enlightenment, which had affected religion in Iceland even though it never became predominant there.

Indeed, the foreign influences on Icelandic historiography in the period were largely in one way or another associated with the Enlightenment. The educated historians had all studied at Copenhagen University and at least some of them were widely read in contemporary as well as in classical literature. Voltaire and Montesquieu were well known in Iceland, for example. Some of the Icelandic histories were didactic as well as being written for the sake of the intellectual satisfaction the writing gave the authors. Belief in progress, advocacy of tolerance, and disapproval of superstition are among the other Enlightenment traits found in the works of the Icelandic historians. The European influences are also seen in the Icelanders' choice of topics and their general approach. Magnus Stephensen's work on Iceland in the eighteenth century stands comparison with con-

temporary European works (the only large-scale Icelandic history of the period to do so), and it is inconceivable that a work like Mannf.hall, to take an example, could have been attempted much earlier.

Moreover, Old Norse studies carried out by Icelanders in this period cannot be seen in specifically Icelandic terms. There were several Icelandic medieval scholars at work abroad in this period, mostly in Copenhagen, the centre of these studies; Reykjavik had not yet assumed an important role in this respect. Their medieval studies in the fields of literature, mythology, and philology have not been dealt with at length in the thesis, but their approach and method of work was very similar to that of their European contemporaries.

The reporting of current events by Icelanders in periodicals and annuals was based on foreign, mainly Danish, models. Sometimes foreign material was freely translated and adapted. Since the Icelandic press dates back only to the 1770s there was no native tradition in this respect.

Looking at Icelandic historiography, c.1790-c.1830, from a European point of view certain factors seem to stand out. History written in Iceland in this period bears the unmistakable stamp of a small, isolated but close-knit society on the fringe of the Enlightenment. The Icelandic historical works were for the most part relatively unsophisticated; the bulk of them were large-scale, often haphazard annalistic compilations or essays on relatively narrow themes. With the exception of the Old

Norse scholars the Icelanders were not much concerned with publishing primary source material. Icelandic historiography was in some ways anachronistic. There was no university in Iceland, and Icelandic historiography was only to a limited extent "academic"; generally speaking, it can only to a degree be associated with any special "upper class" culture.

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1 Joh.Steenstrup, Historieskrivningen i Danmark i det Nittende Aarhundrede (1801-1863), Copenhagen 1889, p.168.

2 ibid. p.140

CHAPTER 14

EPILOGUE:

The 1790-1830 historians and posterity

It would be fitting, finally, to deal briefly with the place of the 1790-1830 period in the evolution of Icelandic historiography as a whole, especially with regard to posterity.

What makes this period stand out from Icelandic historiography prior to 1790, is the influence of the Enlightenment on some of the historians' approach to the subject, the writing of the first analytical history in Icelandic (Magnus Stephensen) and of the first history essentially based on statistics (Hannes Finnsson). Foreign influences on Icelandic historiography had often been marked, e.g. in the Middle Ages when annalistic writing was introduced and in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the period of Northern European humanism. But the 1790-1830 period was perhaps the first time when the ideology of the major historical writers was to a considerable extent moulded by a temporary foreign intellectual current (here I exclude, of course, Christianity in its various phases, which until the nineteenth century at least was a permanent influence on Icelandic historiography). Since the 1830s nothing really comparable has happened. The nationalism that is evident in the writings of many nineteenth century historians naturally cannot be fully divorced from the European nationalistic movements of the period, but it is in many ways a particularly Icelandic phenomenon, and in the twentieth century it is even

more difficult to draw any such parallel. The writings of some historians in the middle twentieth century and beyond show a marked Marxist influence, but as these historians are only a relatively small minority, a predominant trend cannot be spoken of.

I would argue that Jon Espolin in the 1830s, was the last Icelandic historian to write in a way influenced by the Enlightenment, and Tomas Saemundsson the last Icelander to expound an idea of history in the Enlightenment fashion. This does not mean, however, that the historians of the 1790-1830 period did not set a precedent in any way. The purification of the Icelandic language that took place in the first half of the nineteenth century is usually associated with the grammar school at Bessastadir and the romantic poets, but there is no doubt that Espolin's concise and clear style, strongly influenced by the sagas, and his vocabulary, relatively free from Danish words and half-Danish expressions, had a considerable role in this development. Arb.Isl. were read by many in the nineteenth century and beyond and then not least by historically minded people. The style of the nineteenth and early twentieth century folk historians[1] bears a close resemblance to that of Espolin but the folk historians were also directly influenced by the sagas. Even more significantly, perhaps, the emergence of the sagnathaettir (the term defies translation, but it relates to brief accounts of men and events, essentially factual and as such different from legends, but characterized by the narrowness of the themes) as a

fairly important genre of Icelandic literature can be traced partly to Espolin. Some similarity may be found between the Old Icelandic thaettir and the sagnathaettir, but it is difficult to say anything concrete about a potential connection here. While Espolin's annals are not structurally different from earlier annals he introduced a novelty in breaking his account into chapters. Especially in the more detailed description of the recent period, some of the individual chapters resemble individual sagnathaettir by later writers. It is no coincidence that Gisli Konradsson, the first man to write sagnathaettir in what was to be the established tradition, was Espolin's close friend and deeply influenced by him; it would be no exaggeration to label Espolin as Gisli's mentor. Moreover, it may be added that the general approach of the later authors of sagnathaettir, as well as their style, was influenced by Espolin.

Hannes Finnsson and Magnus Stephensen are a different matter in that their historical works seem not to have set a precedent in any way. As for the Icelanders' descriptions of events in the outside world, the pattern of the yearly accounts established in this period was followed in Skirnir until the beginning of the present century. When periodicals, weeklies, monthlies et al., began to be published regularly in Iceland in the middle of the nineteenth century, the pattern was somewhat different owing to the shorter period covered by each issue, but basically the Icelandic journalists of the nineteenth century tended to arrange the foreign news sections in the same way as the writers we have dealt with used to do.

Judgements by posterity

Here I shall attempt to survey assessments made of the historians dealt with in the thesis and their works. I have chosen not to be very subjective in my approach; my own views are expounded earlier in this chapter and in other chapters.

Espolin's Arb.Isl. were not only widely read, they were much used by scholars of subsequent generations as a text-book and a guide to the source materials. Contemporaries called Espolin "hinn froda" i.e. "the learned" and his being made an honorary member of the Literary Society and being granted an unusually high pension by the Danish government shows how highly he was esteemed as does a speech given by Finnur Magnusson at the annual general meeting of the Literary Society in 1826, in which he lavishly praised Espolin's ability as a historian.[2] Gisli Konradsson referred to Espolin as the greatest scholar (fraedimadur) in Icelandic history.[2a] However, Espolin did not win universal acclaim as a scholar. Magnus Stephensen, in a letter to Finnur Magnusson in 1829, where he discusses the publications of the Literary Society makes a derogatory comment on Arb.Isl. (even though he refers to the author as "a relative and friend"). Nine tenths of Arb.Isl., including the genealogies, are useless, he claims, and the Literary Society has lost some members because of its publication of Arb.Isl. These included Dr. Hallgrimur Scheving, teacher of Latin at Bessastadir grammar school and one of the champions of the "renaissance" of Icelandic letters.[3] -

Magnus Stephensen's utterances must be seen in the light of the controversial relationship between the two men. Arni Palsson is almost certainly right in suggesting that Magnus must have known about Sgr.fo.No. soon after Espolin wrote them, but not have thought the work worthy of publication.

Magnus was not the only nineteenth century scholar who was critical of Espolin; so was Jon Sigurdsson. In his lists of the royal stewards in the country, printed in Diplomatarium Islandicum, Jon made a good many references to Espolin but often criticized him for inaccuracy. However, another prominent nineteenth century scholar, Olafur Davidsson (1862-1903) best known for his work in the field of Icelandic folklore, used Espolin's Arb.Isl. as the main source for his work Galdur og galdramal a Islandi (Witchcraft and Cases of Witchcraft in Iceland) (printed 1940-43), apparently regarding Arb.Isl. as trustworthy. Jon Adils, one of the most prominent Icelandic historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, used Skagf. as one of the main sources for his book on Skuli Magnusson.

Generally speaking, Espolin seems to have been held in high esteem in the later nineteenth century. In Thorkell Bjarnason's (1839-1902) Agrip af sogu Islands (A Short History of Iceland) (Reykjavik 1880) Espolin is referred to as one of the century's outstanding writers and scholars.[4] In an introduction which Jon Thorkelsson (1859-1924) a well-known poet and scholar in the field of Icelandic studies, wrote to Sg.J.E. he

referred to him as one of Iceland's great men. He said that Espolin had many good qualities as an historian: extensive knowledge, an outstanding memory, an ability to work fast and get a great deal done, skill in organization, a good understanding of men and matters (a malefnum og monnum), an expertness in describing people and a great ability as a stylist. On the other hand, Espolin's overreliance on his memory made his accounts at times less than trustworthy especially as he was also credulous. Moreover, it was argued that Espolin's accounts of his contemporaries were biased; he did not give those he had been in conflict with their due. Nevertheless, Jon concluded, Espolin was the grandest (svipmesti) and most important Icelandic historian in the nineteenth century and even in a longer period.[4a] In a review of an anthology of nineteenth century Icelandic literature edited by Bogi Melsted (1860-1929), a well-known medievalist, Sigurdur Hjorleifsson (1862-1936) criticizes Bogi for exaggerating the Danish influence on Icelandic literature. Like Jon Thorkelsson Sigurdur stressed Espolin's influence on the development of the Icelandic language and of Icelandic historiography. He argued that recovery of the Icelandic language was not least due to the few Icelanders who wrote well at the turn of the century; Jon Espolin was the most prominent of these. Sigurdur stresses the indirect influence of Espolin on Konrad Gislason (1808-1891), (professor of philology in Copenhagen, one of the four Fjolnismenn (see glossary), who greatly influenced the development of the Icelandic language

and Icelandic literature) through Gisli Konradsson, his father. The failure to include Espolin, whose writings are so great in quantity and quality (svo mikil og merkileg), is a serious defect in the book, indeed almost incomprehensible.[5]

A sample of Espolin's writing was, on the other hand, included in the best known anthology of Icelandic literature, Islenzk lestrarbok 1400-1900 by Sigurdur Nordal (b.1886), the famous Old Norse scholar. In an introductory essay, Samhengid i islenzkum bokmenntum (The Coherence in Icelandic Literature), Nordal stresses that Icelandic literature is best seen as an unbroken tradition; the literature of the period from c.1400 to the early nineteenth century constitutes an essential link between "classical" and "modern" literature. When dealing with the Age of Enlightenment (1750-1835, in his estimation),[6] Nordal does not see any sharp break with tradition. He says that Finnur Jonsson, Hannes Finnsson, Jon Espolin and others took over from Arni Magnusson and Jon Halldorsson. He refers to the excerpts by Jon Espolin and three other writers in the book as proof of his statement that in the Age of Enlightenment the language was both rich and beautiful (audugt og fagurt) when people did not deliberately spoil it. These men did not write outdated medieval language, but the language of the common people, enriched and controlled by the literary language of the past. Nordal makes the same point in the introductory comments to the excerpts from Espolin's works: he says that the language

of Arb.Isl. was pure and concise, far superior to the style of learned men in the eighteenth century. Further, Nordal says that Arb.Isl. do not only testify to the author's exceptional learning (frodleikur) and industry, but also to his understanding and judgement. Nordal chose three chapters from Arb.Isl., all of which have been referred to above: two analytical ones (Tregleiki a sidabreytni, Aldar sidur) and a narrative one (Sidasta hestavig a Islandi), which may be compared with the sagnathaettir. - Even though Nordal, like Sigurdur Hjorleifsson, rather plays down the influence of the Romantic Revival on Icelandic literature, his attitude towards Espolin is coloured by his romantic nationalism: attitudes of this kind were common in early twentieth century Iceland.

Another literary historian, Stefan Einarsson (b.1897) referred to Espolin in his History of Icelandic Prose Writers[7] in a way similar to that of Sigurdur Hjorleifsson and Nordal, his teacher at University: stressing that Espolin in some respects anticipated the Fjolnismenn and that there was a link between him and Konrad Gislason. Stefan also emphasized the role of Espolin as "the preceptor of the nineteenth century fraedimenn, self-taught local historians and genealogists..."[8] Here Stefan meant the folk historians dealt with above. In Stefan's description Espolin's dissatisfaction with the age in which he lived was given excessive prominence: he was seen as "sincerely nationalistic", in the tradition of Eggert Olafsson. As befitted a history of literature, Espolin the novelist got

just as much attention as Espolin the historian. Stefan seems to have known only one of Espolin's novels, Sagan af Arna ljufling yngra, which he described in the context of Icelandic literature, without showing the connection of its ideas with Espolin's historical writings.

It is worth noticing that the approach of two prominent historians to Espolin does not differ very much from the approach of the literary historians dealt with above. Arni Palsson (1878-1952), professor of history, wrote an introduction to the lithographed edition of Arb.Isl., which was published in 1943. The main faults of the work in Arni's opinion were the way in which genealogy was mingled with history and the limitations of the annalistic form which broke up the account of certain developments and often made individual chapters a hotchpotch of separate items. He also criticizes Espolin for his credulity as regards vague rumours, especially in the contemporary sections. However, Arni argues that Espolin has been somewhat unjustly critized for his lack of source criticism; after all Espolin states the imperfections of his work himself time after time. On the more positive side, Arni praises Espolin for his analytical skills and insight, e.g. into cultural history as exemplified in the chapter Aldar sidur. Then Arni refers in laudatory terms to Espolin's judgement even though scholars of succeeding generations have not accepted some of his interpretations. Espolin's descriptions of individuals - mannlysingar - are said to be brilliant, and his mastery of the language and

the way in which he improved stylistically on the accounts of individual events in his sources is highly praised.

Thorkell Johannesson (1895-1960), also a professor of history, deals with Espolin as a historian in a broader way than other writers have done in print, not concentrating exclusively on Arb.Isl., in Saga Islendinga VII.[9] However, he does not make any major evaluation of Espolin's other works. His criticisms of Arb.Isl. are in the same vein as Arni Palsson's, only more severe; he says that Arb.Isl. are very imperfect (naesta ofullkomnar) as a history, mentioning the limitations of Espolin's sources and of the annalistic form, also castigating his source criticism. Thorkell speaks favourably of Espolin's ability as a writer. Like Stefan Einarsson he mentions the importance of Espolin's works for other historical writers, and he says that Arb.Isl. have served to maintain and stimulate the interest of the nation in historical matters. Remarkably, Thorkell has, unlike Sigurdur Nordal and Arni Palsson, nothing very favourable to say about Espolin as a historian in his own right.

Bjorn Thorsteinsson (b.1918) in Enska oldin i sogu Islendinga (The English Century in the History of Iceland) used Arb.Isl. as a source for fifteenth century Icelandic history.

Espolin and his Annals can be linked with several well-known Icelanders: I have come across a few references of this kind without making a deliberate search for them. Hannes Thorsteinsson (1860-1935), the archivist, genealogist, and biographer, described in his autobiography how he had almost drowned in River Tungufljot as a youth when he crossed it on his

way to borrow Espolin's annals.[10] Thorkell Johannesson, in an essay on Stephan G. Stephansson, the outstanding Icelandic-Canadian-American poet, mentioned that Stephan had read Arb.Isl. before the age of twenty, when he left Iceland, and argued that they were one of the works the knowledge of which helps explain the amazing mastery of the Icelandic language by Stephan, a man who had not had any formal schooling, had few leisure hours, and lived away from his mother country for most of his life.[11] Another Icelander who lived away from Iceland for a long period of time, the novelist Gunnar Gunnarsson (b.1886) read Arb.Isl. regularly for the sake of maintaining his sense for his native language.

Less has been written about Hannes Finnsson's and Magnus Stephensen's historical works than those of Espolin. Mannf.hall. was translated into Danish in 1831, but in Iceland it did not gain an outstanding reputation as a work of historical literature even though it was favourably referred to, e.g. by Thorkell Johannesson, who called the essay very remarkable (stormerkileg).[12] In 1970 a new edition of the work by Jon Eythorsson and Johannes Nordal appeared. The latter wrote an introduction to it in which he stressed Hannes's wide range of knowledge as well as his judgement and logical thinking. Johannes said that it was noteworthy how modern Hannes's approach was and how free he was from prejudices. Johannes dealt especially with Hannes's use of demographic statistics, and emphasized his role as a pioneer in that field. He hoped that the new edition of this work, which

he regarded as the most important one by Hannes, would serve to give Hannes the recognition which he deserved; he argued that among the Icelandic public Hannes was not held in high enough esteem compared with various of his contemporaries.

Shortly after the publication of Magnus Stephensen's Isl.Att.Aarh., a review of the book by Professor Laurits Engelstoft appeared in Kjobenhavnske Laerde Efterretninger.[13] Engelstoft's estimation was basically favourable; he said at the end that it could be hoped that the work would contribute to the benefit of Iceland. He praised especially the section on Iceland's economy, which in his opinion was the fullest and most instructive and therefore the most valuable one. Engelstoft, however, criticized various aspects of Magnus's work. For example not enough attention was given to the effect of the sale of the farms belonging to the bishoprics; the account of education was lacking in coherence; Magnus was inconsistent in admiring cultural progress yet at the same time lamenting the condition of the people; in his account of the judiciary in general there was undue emphasis on the early part of the century, and maintenance of law and order (politivaesenet) neglected; Engelstoft said that it was not fitting, "forced" (tvungent) to begin a list of officials by an account of the kings. Generally, the review was characterized by being written by a man who saw Iceland as a part of the Danish monarchy. Revealing in that respect is his introductory comment that the gain made from the modification of the censorship laws, which meant that political

affairs could be discussed more freely than before, had not been as great as might have been expected.

According to Thorkell Johannesson[14] Magnus's work on Iceland in the eighteenth century was often referred to by scholars. Thorkell's own judgement was that the history was for a long time the best (greinarbezta) work on the history of Iceland in the eighteenth century.

There is only limited data available for the historiography of other works dealt with in the thesis.

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1 The term "folk historian" may not be perfect in this context, but I use it for the lack of anything better. Those I call folk historians were largely self-educated men who wrote for their own satisfaction and for love of frodleikur, mostly biographies and sagnathaettir. The foremost folk historians in the nineteenth century were Gisli Konradsson, Dadi "frodi" Nielsson (1809-1857), Sighvatur Grimsson Borgfirdingur (1840-1930), and Brynjolfur Jonsson fra Minnanupi (1838-1914).

2 Skirnir, I, (1827).

2a Skagf. Chapter 244. "...einna mestur fraedimadur hefur a Islandi verid, baedi ad fornu og nyju."

3 Arni Palsson, "Um Espolin og Arbaekurnar", an introduction to Arb.Isl., lithographed edition, Reykjavik 1943.

4 Thorkell Bjarnason, Agrip af sogu Islands, Reykjavik 1880, p.139f.

4a Sg.J.E. p.xxix

5 Sunnanfari, I, (1891), Copenhagen 1891, p.20f.

6 Sigurdur Nordal, Islenzk lestrarbok 1400-1900, Reykjavik 1924.

7 Ithaca, N.Y. 1948, p.11, p.18; the same material is used in his History of Icelandic Literature, New York 1956.

8 ibid. p.18

9 pp.549-553

10 Hannes Thorsteinsson, Endurminningar og hugleidingar um hitt og thetta, er a dagana hefur drifid, Reykjavik 1962, p.12f.

11 Thorkell Johannesson, "Stephan G. Stephansson. Hundrad ara minning", Lydir og landshagir, II, Reykjavik 1966, p.222.

12 Thorkell Johannesson, Saga Islendinga VII, p.542.

13 Nos. 26, 28, and 29, Copenhagen 1808.

14 Thorkell Johannesson, Saga Islendinga VII, p.547.

APPENDIX: GLOSSARY

AGE OF THE STURLUNGS, THE. (c.1220-1262). The S. were the descendants of the farmer and godi Sturla Thordarson (the elder, d.1183). The S. became one of the leading families in Iceland and at times the most powerful one: Sturla Thordarson's three sons, including Snorri the historian, together with some of their descendants, such as the historian Sturla Thordarson, played an important role in Icelandic politics for most of the thirteenth century. The period of upheaval and civil war which preceded the personal union between Iceland and Norway in 1262 has consequently been called the Age of the Sturlungs; it is taken to have begun about 1220 or somewhat earlier.

ALTHING a judicial and legislative institution, held at Thingvellir practically every summer from c.930 to 1798, then discontinued and reopened as an advisory national assembly in Reykjavik in 1845. In the Age of Commonwealth and to a lesser extent until the eighteenth century it had an important social function as well; people frequented these meetings even if they had, strictly speaking, no business to be there.

In the Age of Commonwealth the legislative function and the judicial one of the A. were separated: the legislative powers were given to an independent institution, which functioned at the A., logretta, led by the logsogumadur (q.v.). Various tribunals courts functioned at the A.: fjordungsdomur, fimmtardomur and prestadomur. - Shortly after Iceland came under the Norwegian Crown and the structure of the A. was changed. The logretta now became primarily a court although it kept its legislative function to some extent. Certain court decisions arising out of test cases, Althingissamthykktir, had the force of law.

After the establishment of the absolute monarchy in 1662 the A. was no longer a law-making body, the attendance went down, and there was a general decline in the eighteenth century, ending with the A's discontinuation.

AMTMADUR (plural: amtmenn), originally the deputy of the stiftamtmadur (q.v.), residing in Iceland. The first Icelandic amtmadur was Magnus Gislason, who filled the office from 1752 to 1766. Changes were made in the system in 1770, and again in 1783 and 1787. Now the country was divided up into three omt (singular: amt), every one of which covered several syslur: the South, the West, and the North and East. The stiftamtmadur was automatically a. in the South and supervised the doings of the other two a., who dealt with the routine business in their district with which the stiftamtmadur had previously been concerned. After this change the a. (other than the stiftamtmadur) were normally Icelanders; among the ones in the North were Stefan Thorarinsson, Espolin's half-brother, and Grimur Jonsson. - The office was abolished in 1873.

FERSKEYTLA (plural: ferskeytlur), quatrain, verse of four lines usually rhyming a b a b. The making of f. was and still is very popular at all levels of Icelandic society. An example:

Yfir kaldan eydisand
einn um nott eg sveima.
Nu er horfid Nordurland,
nu a eg hvergi heima.

FJOLNISMENN, four Icelanders who joined forces to publish the annual Fjolnir in Copenhagen. These were: Tomas Saemundsson, Konrad Gislason, Jonas Hallgrimsson (1809 - 1845), and Brynjolfur Petursson (1810 - 1851). The first

volume of Fjolnir appeared in 1835, the ninth and last in 1847. Fjolnir played an important role in Icelandic politics, language and literature.

GODI (chieftain) (plural: godar) and GODORD. The system at godord had come into being by 930 when the Althing was founded. There were 36, after 965 39, godord in the country. It was not necessarily a geographical unit, but based on mutual agreement between the g. and those who wanted to be his clients (thingmenn). The g. wielded great power at local level and were logrettumenn (q.v.). In the course of time the balance of power in the country was upset when many godord came to belong to one individual or one family. When a new legal code, Jarnsida, was introduced in 1271 the godord system was abolished. In pagan times the g. were associated with the practice of religion.

HID ISLENZKA BIBLIUFELAG (The Icelandic Bible Society) was founded in 1816 on the initiative of the Scottish minister Rev. Ebenezer Henderson, who had visited the country. The society, which still exists, generously supported a revision of the earlier Icelandic translations of the Bible; the finances of their Bible edition stirred up some controversy.

HID ISLENZKA BOKMENNTAFELAG (The Literary Society of Iceland) was founded in 1816; its originator was the Danish philologist Rasmus Christian Rask. The society, which until 1912 operated through two departments, in Reykjavik and Copenhagen, soon began to publish large works as well as an annual with foreign news. The society not only published Espolin's Annals; it also honoured him with gifts.

HID ISLENZKA LANDSUPPFRAEDINGARFELAG (The Icelandic Society for National Enlightenment) (later known as Islands uppfraedingarstiftun, i.e. the Icelandic Institution for Enlightenment) was founded on Magnus Stephensen's initiative in 1794. Its aims were to spread knowledge and encourage reading among all classes of the population by publishing good, select works which could instruct as well as entertain. During the thirty-odd years of its existence the society published a variety of books as well as the periodical Minnisverd tidindi (1796-1808); Stephensen himself, always the man behind the society, published the monthly Klausturposturinn for eight years.

HID ISLENZKA LAERDOMSLISTAFELAG (The Icelandic Society of Learned Arts) was founded by a group of Icelanders in Copenhagen in 1779. Its aim was to support all arts and sciences which could be of any consequence to Iceland. The first president of the society was Jon Eiriksson. In 1781-96 the society published an annual, which contained diverse material; the influence of the Enlightenment was as a whole clearly seen in the selection of topics.

HIRDSTJORI (plural: hirdstjorar), the title of the principal royal steward in Iceland from c.1300 to the end of the fifteenth century. After that both this term and the term hofudsmadur (plural: hofudsmenn) are used alternatively and sometimes even the term fogeti as well until the mid sixteenth century when the term hofudsmadur began to be used exclusively. In 1683 the office was abolished - on the ~~instruction~~ introduction of a new system of administration at top level.

Usually there was just one h. on Iceland, sometimes 2, more rarely 4. Sometimes foreigners were appointed to the post in spite of the Icelanders'

protests. Some of these foreign h. did not spend much time in Iceland, but had agents. The salary of the h. was part of the royal revenues, but after 1354 the office was let out. The h. collected royal revenues, administered the royal estates, acted as judges in some cases and supervised trade and defence. The highest administrative and police power in the country was vested in them.

HREPPUR (plural: hreppar), an administrative unit at a communal level presumably dating back to the mid tenth century and still in existence. We do not know exactly the number of these until 1703, when it was 164, but it probably has not increased much throughout history. The h. were independent units, which had no direct connection with the godord or the parishes. In the Age of Commonwealth the h. were in charge of provision for the poor and of an insurance system, and organized the gathering of the sheep in the mountain pastures in the autumn etc. By the mid twelfth century, at any rate, a system had come into being by which there was one, and one only, official of the h., called hreppstjori. After the end of the Commonwealth the insurance element disappeared, but the hreppstjori were now in charge of collecting taxes for the king, which were to be delivered by the royal steward. Otherwise the function of the h. remained largely unchanged. The hreppstjorar were appointed by the king in the modern period and were next below the syslumenn (q.v.) in the administrative hierarchy. In the late nineteenth century the election of a committee of 3 or 5 to run the affairs of the individual h. was introduced; but the hreppstjori continued as the representative of the authorities.

JÁRNSIÐA, a legal code introduced in Iceland in 1271-3 after the union with the Norwegian king had been established. It was superseded by the Jónsbók (q.v.) in 1280.

JÓNSBÓK (named after Lögmaður Jón Einarsson), a legal code introduced in Iceland on King Magnus of Norway's initiative in 1280. Parts of it were in force for centuries and it was for long the most widely read book in Iceland.

KANCELLI (chancery), a Danish governmental department in charge of judicial affairs and administration. In 1800 the k. was divided into sub-departments and Icelandic affairs were assigned to the Norwegian jurisdictional department. After the union between Denmark and Norway ceased in 1814, Icelandic affairs were assigned to the individual sub-departments according to their nature, on the same basis as Danish affairs. Ordinances issued by the k. were known in Iceland as kansellíbréf.

KLAUSTURHALDARI, supervisor of the property of cloisters confiscated by secular power.

LANDFÓGETI, one of the key officials in the administrative system of the 1680s. The l. was to supervise the finances of the country. He was in charge of the royal estates, trade and fishing, and collected the taxes. The first Icelandic l. was Skúli Magnússon (appointed in 1749).

LANDSNEFND, a committee of two Danes and one Icelander, set up by the Danish government under the auspices of physiocracy in 1770, in order to make a report on the economic conditions in Iceland and the possibilities of improving the lot of the nation. The committee concerned itself primarily with agricultural problems and consequently decrees were issued dealing with the establishment of new farms and methods of improving the cultivation of the soil. These, however, were not of much long-term importance.

In 1785, during the Moduhardindi (q.v.) another landsnefnd was formed to make proposals for alleviating the plight of the country.

LANDSYFIRRETTUR, a high court in Reykjavik 1800–1919. In the course of the eighteenth century the once famous Althing at Thingvellir became essentially a high court, presided over by two logmenn (q.v.). The prestige of the Althing steadily diminished, and conditions where it was held became appalling. In 1798 the Althing was held at Thingvellir for the last time; in the next years it was held at Reykjavik. Then it was decided, largely on Magnus Stephensen's initiative, to abolish the Althing and establish the l. in its place. Its three judges dealt with appeals from the syslur, but appeals could be made from the l. to the Supreme Court in Copenhagen. Although the abolition of the Althing was later to be regretted (it was established anew on 1843) the establishmant of the l. can be seen as the biggest step forward in judicial proceedings in Iceland since the tenth century; largely thanks to Magnus Stephensen, who was Chief Justice for more than thirty years, it marked the breakthrough of humanitarian attitudes towards law and punishment in Iceland.

LANGSPIL, an Icelandic stringed instrument with 1–6 strings, one of the two traditional Icelandic musical instruments (the other was the violin). Dating back to the Middle Ages, the l. was played by a limited number of people until

the nineteenth century; since then the instrument has seldom been heard.

LOGMADUR (plural: logmenn), the leader of the logretta. This office replaced that of logsogumadur in 1271; the first l. was the historian Sturla Thordarson. From 1283 onwards there were usually two l., one for the South and the East, the other for the North and the West. Usually the l. was elected by the logretta. His functions were largely the same as those of the Norwegian lagmand; he presided over the logretta, which now was the country's high court. In the eighteenth century the l. were the only ones with judicial power at the Althing. The post of l. was a very respectable one.

LOGRETTUMADUR (plural: logrettumenn), a member of the logretta (see Althing), which after 965 included twelve representatives of each fjordungur (quarter) and two assistants to each of these as well as the two bishops and the logsogumadur (q.v.). - With the introduction of the new legal codes, Jarnsida in 1271 and Jonsbok in 1280, the structure of the logretta changed. The syslumenn now appointed three representatives from each district: as a result there were 36 l. altogether. The function of the logretta changed as well: it now became a high court (later it was divided into two branches, one for the South and the East, one for the North and the West).

After the introduction into Iceland of the so-called Norwegian laws in the early eighteenth century the l., who in practice were appointed by the logmenn, did not take part in the judicial proceedings. Their number steadily diminished; at the close of the century there were only four of them. The post naturally disappeared with the Althing. - Besides the actual l. other people could be nominated to go to the Althing; those nominated were collectively known as nefndarmenn.

LOGSOGUMADUR (lawspeaker of the Althing), the highest official in the Icelandic Commonwealth. Elected for a three year period by the logretta he recited the existing law at the meetings of the Althing and made public announcements there, and at any time he could be consulted about what was law and what was not. Outside the Althing he had no administrative function. The office was abolished in 1271.

MANNTALSTHING, an assembly held in each hreppur (q.v.) every summer where the syslumadur (q.v.) transacted official business with the inhabitants of the hreppur, collected taxes etc.

MODUHARDINDI (literally 'the hard times of the mist'), a period of disaster in Iceland following the gigantic erruption at Lakagigir, west of Vatrajokull, in 1783. The atmosphere became mingled with poisonous substances that severely affected the vegetation of the whole country. The bulk of livestock perished and in a couple of years there was a population decline of some 20%. The Danes gave some help, but it took the country several years to recover.

RENTEKAMMER (the chamber), a Danish governmental department which was in charge of the finances of Iceland and commerce there. This department was a creation of the absolute monarchy (established in Denmark in 1660) and the structure did not change during the period under survey. It issued ordinances known as kammerbref dealing with Icelandic affairs.

RIGSDAL, a Danish coin, valid in Iceland in the Age of Enlightenment. A r. was the equivalent of 96 skildinger (shillings) and half a specie.

RIMUR, metrical romances, a popular form of poetry prominent in Iceland after the Reformation and until the later nineteenth century, intoned in a special way. The r. were based on themes from chivalric romances, tales of antiquity, family sagas etc. The number of the r. metres was legion, but there was always an introductory mansongur, love song.

SAGNASKEMMTUN, a tradition, which dates back to the early twelfth century, of telling tales or reading books or manuscripts aloud as a means of popular entertainment. Widely practised until the nineteenth century, especially at individual farms on winter nights when people were working indoors, the s. played an important role in Icelandic literary history and historiography.

STIFTAMTMADUR (plural: stiftamtmenn). When a new administrative system was introduced in Iceland in the period 1683-88 the office of s. was established. The s. was in charge of the general administration in the country and had judicial authority in cases concerning the church. Originally only Danes were appointed to the post, and the s. were not resident in the country; consequently their powers were delegated to an amtmadur (q.v.). After changes in the system in the period 1770-87 the s. lived in Iceland and at the same time held the position of amtmadur of one of the three omt, that of the South. The only Icelander ever to be appointed s. was Olafur Stefansson, Magnus Stephensen's father and a relative of Jon Espolin, who occupied the post 1790-1803. The office was abolished in 1873 when the Icelanders were granted limited autonomy and a new administrative system introduced.

STUDENT (plural: studentar), a pupil who had passed the final examination at a grammar school or a corresponding one set by a private tutor. Many s. became parsons without any further education, but being qualified to enter university, some s. went abroad - the great majority to Copenhagen - to continue their studies.

SYSLUMADUR (plural: syslumenn), also valdsmadur, sheriff, a post still in existence, established in the late thirteenth century when the godord were abolished. The district of the s., the sysla, was originally known as thing. The number of the syslur varied, but in modern times it was normally about twenty. The duties of the s. included collecting taxes and dues and hearing and judging criminal cases, and until the Althing was abolished many of the s. rode to Thingvellir to attend its sessions. The income of the s. was not fixed, but depended on the amount of business he did - some of the syslur drew more income than others and many a s. became well off. The s. sometimes had a deputy, known in modern times as logsagnari.

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